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FOURTEEN DISCOURSES ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE LATE

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OF ABERDEEN.

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BRITAN
NICVM

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE author of these Discourses, in his life-time was much esteemed for his private virtues, and greatly admired in his public capacity: —— He had consented to their publication; — but death prevented his executing this task himself.

They are now given to the public from his own manuscript; and the Editor sincerely wishes

they may be as favourably read, as they were attentively received when delivered from the pulpit; — and, if they may be any way conducive to the advancement of religion, or the eternal good of mankind, he conſiders the chief end of their publication as fully anſwered.

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DISCOURSE I.

THE COMFORTS OF A RELIGIOUS LIFE.

2 Cor. v. 7.

We walk by faith, not by ſight.

IN his former epiſtle to the Corinthians, St. Paul had told them, that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are fooliſhneſs unto him: and no doubt this maxim in my text is one of thoſe ſpiritual truths, which every natural or carnal-minded man will account the very height of folly—To walk by faith, and not by ſight. "*What!*" will theſe men be ready to ſay to the Apoſtle, as the Iſraelites did to Moſes, "*wilt thou put out the eyes* "*of this people?*" Would you have us forego the pleaſures of ſenſe, the natural entertainments of this preſent life, for the diſtant hopes and remote expectations of another world? No, truly! Give us

ſome ſuch gods as may go in and out before us. Give us ſome lively, chearful, ſenſible recreations; for as to theſe, your future and inviſible things, we wot not what may become of them. Give us ſuch enjoyments as the preſent world affords; and let thoſe live upon hopes, who can be content with ſo thin a diet, or who have nothing elſe to live upon.

Such is the language of every natural or unregenerate perſon, whenever he ſpeaks out the real ſentiments of his heart. And yet, as wiſe as theſe people imagine themſelves, and as fooliſh as they think thoſe who take the ſame courſe with our Apoſtle, 'tis evident that they themſelves contradict the notions of all the wiſe men that ever were; nay, they contradict, in ſome reſpects, the notions of all mankind, even in the management of their temporal affairs; for in theſe, as well as in the matters of religion, we are forced to walk by faith, at leaſt full as much as by ſight, and to exert our endeavours upon the hope of what is to come, and even when the event is very uncertain.—Thus the traveller walks, in hopes of coming to his journey's end, which at preſent is out of his

his ſight. And his faith has ſome reſemblance unto Abraham's; who is called the Father of the Faithful, becauſe he went forth, not knowing whither he went.—The huſbandman ſows, in hopes of reaping a plentiful harveſt; though, for a ſeaſon, his hopes lie all buried under ground. And this caſting his ſeed into the earth, St. Paul uſes as an argument, or at leaſt an illuſtration of that fundamental point of faith, the reſurrection.—The merchant ventures all his ſtock upon the ſame aſſurance, and parts with his preſent ſubſtance, in hopes of a good return to come. And this traffick alſo our Saviour makes an emblem of the kingdom of Heaven, that pearl of great price, for which a wiſe man ſells all that he has to buy it.—Since then it is ſo ordinary a thing for men to walk by faith, and not by ſight, even in the affairs of this world, which are the proper objects of our ſight, what unreaſonable perverſeneſs is it to reject the Chriſtian faith, which is the evidence of things not ſeen; and require a viſible demonſtration of that which, in its own nature, is at preſent above, and out of the reach of our bodily ſenſes!—But, in order to convince you of this the more

perfectly, I ſhall proſecute my diſcourſe on this ſubject in the following method: 1ſt, I ſhall conſider what St. Paul here means by walking by faith, and walking by ſight. 2dly, I ſhall ſhew the happy effects and conſequences of walking by faith, and not by ſight: and ſo conclude with a ſhort practical application of my whole diſcourſe.

1ſt then, we are to conſider what St. Paul here means by walking by faith, and walking by ſight. Faith, as the ſame Apoſtle elegantly defines it *, is the ſubſtance, or rather, as it is tranſlated in the margin, the ground or confidence, or confident expectation, of things hoped for; the evidence or conviction of things not ſeen; i. e. in other words, it is the knowledge of thoſe things which we do not perceive or diſcover by our ſenſes; the knowledge of God and of another world, and of all thoſe things relating thereto, which God hath been pleaſed to reveal and diſcover unto us. When this knowledge is merely ſpeculative; when it is wholly confined to the head or underſtanding, but has little or no influence

* Heb. xi. 1.

upon

upon our hearts and lives, it is what we commonly call a mere hiſtorical faith, and what St. James calls a dead faith; a faith that will never be of any benefit or advantage to us, but, on the contrary, will aggravate our ſin, and ſo increaſe our condemnation. But when our faith, or knowledge of God and ſpiritual things, has its proper effect; when it makes us live and act like thoſe who look beyond this preſent ſtate, and know that our eternal happineſs or miſery in another world depends upon our behaviour here; then it is what the Scripture calls a ſaving or juſtifying faith; a principle that makes us act juſtly and properly with reſpect to God, our neighbour, and ourſelves; and for which, when we are brought to judgment, God will accept of us, and reward us as juſt or righteous perſons, overlooking, and not imputing to us, the manifold defects or imperfections of our righteouſneſs, for the ſake and merits of Jeſus Chriſt, our Saviour. In few words, then, to walk by faith, is to live up to the rules and maxims, and with a ſerious regard to the promiſes and threatenings of the goſpel. It is, to have a conſtant eye to

God in all our actions, and a lively ſenſe of his preſence; a firm belief that he is privy to the moſt ſecret motions of our hearts, and that he will at laſt reward or puniſh us, according as we have done good or evil in this preſent ſtate of trial: in conſequence of which belief, we regulate our intentions and actions by his holy and righteous laws, and ſincerely endeavour to approve ourſelves in his ſight. It is to live ſuitably to that faith, whoſe ſharp and piercing eye looks above and beyond this preſent periſhing world, and tells us that we have no abiding city, no fixed or permanent abode here; but that we are haſtening to a country where we muſt remain for ever in a ſtate of unchangeable bliſs or woe: in conſequence of which, we live like pilgrims and ſtrangers here, and make it our chief buſineſs to provide ourſelves a happy ſettlement in that country to which we more properly belong, and in which we are for ever to remain. This is "*to walk by faith.*"

I need not uſe many words in deſcribing what it is to walk by ſight, as it is the very reverſe of this, and the courſe that is daily taken by the men of this world.

Theſe

Theſe men will perhaps acknowledge that there is a Supreme Being, and that he is the firſt cauſe or Creator of all things; but they never conſider him, either as the Witneſs of their actions now, or as the Judge of them hereafter. On the contrary, as the Pſalmiſt expreſſeth it, "*God is not in all their thoughts.*" They have neither a ſenſe of his preſence, nor a truſt in his providence, nor the leaſt fear of his vindictive juſtice. In conſequence of this, they live as without God in the world; they walk by the ſight of their own eyes, and in the ways of their own hearts, without the leaſt regard to that aweful denunciation, That for all theſe things God will bring them into judgment. Senſe is the low and narrow principle by which they judge of every thing; and to believe any thing that lies beyond its reach, they think fooliſh credulity. For inſtance, we can know nothing by ſenſe, no, nor by our natural reaſon, without the help of revelation, what ſhall be the condition of men after death. There is a black thick cloud between the living and the dead, through which we cannot ſee with our bodily eyes, and a gulph which we can-

not paſs. We have no intercourſe, no correſpondence there; and no mere man ever came from thence to give us information: none but Chriſt, who is both God and man; it is he only who has diſcovered to us the ſecrets of the other world. But theſe philoſophers, as our modern infidels vainly affect to call themſelves, will truſt to nothing but their own ſenſes, and their own experience; and ſo reject the rational ſolid evidence which we have for the truth of the goſpel; and will not believe a future ſtate, becauſe they have not yet ſeen it with their own eyes: juſt as the African or Indian prince, who lived under the Torrid Zone, ridiculed all that the European traveller told him, concerning froſt and ice, as fiction, becauſe there was nothing of that kind ever ſeen or heard of in his country. Such, preciſely, are the reaſonings and arguments of ſome of the moſt celebrated infidel writers of the preſent age. And when ſuch is their belief, or rather I ſhould ſay their unbelief, we need not wonder at their practice. When men imagine that there is nothing to be either hoped or feared after death, what wonder if their

hearts

hearts are wholly ſet upon preſent enjoyments? what wonder although they ſtick at nothing, if they can but accompliſh their preſent views? The truth is, the heart miſleads the head full as oft as the head miſleads the heart. Whatever they may pretend, their averſion to the Chriſtian faith is not becauſe any point of it is contrary to their ſenſe and reaſon; for there are few of them of ſo little ſenſe as to reject it upon that ſcore: but the true reaſon why they reject revelation is, becauſe it contradicts their ſenſual inclinations; teaches them to deny, not their natural faculties, but their ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and commands them to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world. Now, this is a ſort of life which they do not deſire to be acquainted with: they have no heart for ſpiritual duties, no reliſh for ſpiritual rewards, and therefore they cannot comply with a revelation that is ſo contrary to fleſh and blood. Had the goſpel complied with their ſenſual humour, they would have been as credulous as Chriſtians are. This, joined to their ignorance, was the very thing that made ſo great a part of mankind

run ſo eagerly into the Mahometan religion, in ſpite of its groſs abſurdities; even becauſe it indulged their ſenſuality in this world, and promiſed them greater indulgences in the next: and for the ſake of this, there is no error ſo abſurd that they will not believe, no enterprize ſo hazardous that they will not undertake. As long as their religion maintains their pleaſure, they will maintain the honour of their religion; and do not think it any violence to their reaſon to walk by faith, and not by ſight. The caſe is much the ſame with our modern Deiſts and unbelievers; they embrace the errors and abſurdities of infidelity, which are groſs and glaring, and reject the evidence for Chriſtianity, which is clear and rational; and all this, becauſe their hearts are wholly taken up with the enjoyments of this world, the luſt of the eyes, the luſt of the fleſh, or the pride of life; i. e. in other words, avarice, ſenſuality, and pride or ambition. The gratifying one or other of thoſe paſſions, is the chief good of theſe men; and ſo, for the ſake of thoſe, they break through all the rules of religion, and renounce

nounce all hope or belief of a life to come.

And having thus ſhewn you what it is to walk by faith, and not by ſight; and likewiſe what it is to walk by ſight, and not by faith; I ſhall now proceed to the ſecond branch of my propoſed method of diſcourſe, viz. to point out to you ſome of the happy effects and conſequences of the former of theſe courſes. —And 1ſt, The walking by faith, and not by ſight, is the only way to make our life tolerably eaſy and comfortable. Contentment and peace of mind are ſo eſſentially neceſſary to our preſent happineſs, that without theſe, all wordly acquiſitions, of whatever kind, turn out not only to be mere vanity, but likewiſe vexation of ſpirit. But how little of this inward peace and contentment is to be found among thoſe who walk not by faith, or are not under the influence of religion! To outward appearance, indeed, they may ſeem happy; and they who look no farther, will be ready to ſay, Where is happineſs to be found, if it is not among the gay and the great; among thoſe who figure in public places; who baſk in the ſunſhine of proſperity,

are

are cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fare ſumptuouſly every day, and have riches, pleaſures and honours at command? Does not the ſum and ſubſtance, the heighth and perfection of human happineſs conſiſt in theſe things? Thus do they think who look no farther than the ſurface; but are ſtrangers to the real ſtate of great, irreligious men. Thoſe who are more thoroughly acquainted with them plainly ſee, that there is often more real miſery in the moſt ſplendid palaces, than in the meaneſt cottage. Deſtitute of religion, the great and rich are mere ſlaves to their own ſenſual appetites, which ſeldom give them any reſt or peace, but tyrannize over them with the moſt deſpotic ſway. Satiated, cloyed, and wearied with their enjoyments, they ſometimes may be; but never are ſatisfied. Hence we ſee them continually reſtleſs, and roaming about in purſuit of new objects, and always in want of ſomething elſe, or ſomething more than what they have. Some of them perpetually engaged in artificial amuſements, and trifling, inſignificant diſſipation; ſome graſping at the airy phantoms of low ambition,

ambition, or proſecuting the ſordid deſigns of avarice and ſelf-intereſt; and others rioting in brutal debauchery, and ſuch abandoned profligacy of manners as renders them at once the ſcorn and nuiſance of all rational ſociety, and the immediate inſtruments of their own ruin.

Such is the life of wicked, irreligious men, even in their beſt and moſt proſperous ſtate; a life embittered with corroding cares and raging paſſions, which are continually tearing and tormenting their minds; to ſay nothing of the outward croſſes and troubles they daily meet with, from the oppoſition of thoſe who are as worldly-minded or as wicked as themſelves. And if ſuch is their ſtate in their greateſt proſperity; if it is ſo remote from true happineſs and content; how compleatly wretched muſt they be, when they fall into adverſity! When all, I ſay not their goods, but their very gods in whom they truſted, are taken from them; and they have nothing left, but the cutting remembrance of what they once were, and the burning deſire, without the leaſt hope, of being ſuch again! What wonder if they then ſink, as they uſually do, into all the

horrors of grief and deſpair! What wonder if they become as mean-ſpirited and abject in adverſity, as they were haughty and inſolent in proſperity!

How widely different from this, is the ſtate of the man who walks by faith, and has an eye to God in all his actions! His paſſions are corrected, his affections and deſires are elevated far above any thing that he ſees here; and enjoying, as he does, communion with his God, and the hopes of a happy eternity, he looks with due indifference on all the objects of ſenſe; and heartily deſpiſes all the allurements of this paſſing, periſhing world. In the principles and practice, in the joys and comforts of religion, he finds a ſolid and true happineſs; happineſs ſuperior to chance or time, and independent of all earthly power or connections. God, the perfect, all-ſufficient good, the fountain of all true bliſs, is always preſent to his mind, as his father and his friend; and heaven is ever open to his eye, as his inheritance and final portion, in and through Chriſt Jeſus. And hence it is that he is ſo happy; hence it is that he is ſo contented and eaſy, in every ſtate and condition.

dition. His truſt in God is ſo entire; and his acquieſcence in the divine will ſo ſincere, that he neither grieves immoderately for what is paſt, murmurs at the preſent, or is too anxious or fearful about what is to come. He knows that the providence of God is ſufficient for every time and place, and for every exigency and occaſion. He knows that God's dutiful children and ſervants have the promiſe of his ſpecial care, even as to their moſt minute concerns; that the very hairs of their head are all numbered; and that all things, however ſeemingly croſs and ſevere, are really and effectually working together for their eternal intereſt and good. Therefore, deſpiſing all thoſe brittle reeds, which worldly men are ſo apt to truſt to; and all thoſe anxious unprofitable cares and deſigns with which they are ſo continually tormented, he caſteth all his care upon that God, who, he is perfectly well aſſured, will always care for him. Such is the happineſs of the man who walks by faith, during the courſe of his life.

2dly. There is another ſeaſon in which faith diſplays its comforting power and influence, in a yet more lively manner;

i. e.

i. e. in the hour of death. The fears and apprehenſions of death are at all times a dreadful terror to the worldly-minded man; but moſt of all, when he finds the time of it drawing nigh. He knows, that when he dies, he muſt leave all his pomp and all his pride behind him: and the greater his fortune is, the more unwilling is he to leave it. He finds all his worldly advantages to be but miſerable comforters indeed, in that critical, that aweful moment. He finds all his appetites for them dead and gone already; his body juſt ſinking into duſt and rottenneſs; and his ſoul, which is now his all, unadorned with virtue, unendowed with grace, and wholly unprepared for that world, to which it is departing. But that which diſtreſſes him moſt of all, is the remorſe and laſhes of his own conſcience. Formerly he could make a ſhift to drown its voice, by the noiſe and buſtle of his ſenſual enjoyments. But now, it ſpeaks loud, and will be heard; and all the obſtacles are removed, which before hindered it from doing its office. Alas! what does it ſpeak? Not joy or comfort, but anguiſh and fear inexpreſſible! It preſents to his mind, not the favour or the mercy, but the juſtice

of

of an offended God, and the remembrance of a life ſpent in ſin and folly! It preſents to his view, not the merits or the mediation of a Saviour; but the wrath of the Lamb, from which he would now wiſh to be delivered, at the expence of ten thouſand worlds! This is a ſituation too dreadful to be deſcribed. And I pray God, none of us may ever know any thing of it, from our own ſad experience. But now, let us turn our eyes to the different ſtate of the truly good and religious man, at that aweful, that important period. His faith preſents to his view, the gracious promiſes of the goſpel, and all the joys and glories of eternity. He muſt be conſcious to himſelf of many ſins and imperfections; he well knows the worthleſſneſs even of his very beſt ſervices. But his conſcience at the ſame time bears witneſs to his ſincere ſorrow and repentance for all his tranſgreſſions, and to his hearty endeavours to lead a life of true Chriſtian piety and holineſs: and his faith preſents him with the comforting view of Jeſus Chriſt the righteous, interceding with God the Father in his behalf, and covering all his defects by the bright garment

garment of his own perfect obedience, and unſpotted righteouſneſs. Theſe, and ſuch thoughts as theſe, are the ſupport of every ſincere Chriſtian, at the hour of death, and enable him to ſay triumphantly with St. Paul, "*O death! "where is thy ſting? O grave! where "is thy victory?*"—It remains then only that we all be perſuaded ſo to walk by faith, and ſo to deſpiſe all thoſe allurements to ſin, which preſent themſelves to our ſenſes, that, having ſent our hearts before us, to that bleſſed place, which our Saviour Chriſt has gone to prepare for all his faithful followers, we may be at laſt received into it, through the merits and mediation of the ſame Jeſus our Saviour.

DIS-

DISCOURSE II.

ON

HUMILITY,

AND

TRUST IN GOD.

2. KINGS v. 1.

Now Naaman, captain of the hoſt of the king of Syria, was a great man with his maſter, and honourable, becauſe by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria; he was alſo a mighty man of valour; but he was a leper.

THE ſhort hiſtory of Naaman the Syrian affords us room for great plenty of curious remarks and profitable ſpeculations, which may ſerve for our inſtruction in all the ſeveral circumſtances of our fortune, all the diſpenſations of human life. I intend therefore, with the divine aſſiſtance, to offer ſome remarks upon this piece of ſacred hiſtory, without confining myſelf wholly to the ſingle verſe I have read for my text; but taking in ſuch other circumſtances as are moſt

moſt worthy of notice, and beſt calculated for improvement.

1ſt, then, let us conſider Naaman, as he is repreſented to us here in my text; where we obſerve him deſcribed in ſuch a ſituation, as may at once render him the object both of envy and of pity. In his perſon he was a mighty man of valour, which is one of the higheſt gifts of nature; and God, who is the true and only fountain of honour, had made him his inſtrument in giving deliverance to Syria his country; by which means he came to make a great and ſhining figure; was advanced to be captain of his maſter's hoſt, the very next place, in thoſe days, to the ſovereign himſelf; and behaved himſelf ſo in that high ſtation, as to become great in the eye of his prince, and honourable in the eye of the people: which two things do not always go together; for a man may be great, without being truly honourable; as on the other hand, a man may be truly honourable, who is not what is commonly called great. For true honour is not confined to any particular degree, ſtation, or condition of life, but lies open to, and may be attained by a man of any

any rank whatever. It is true, the common notions of honour are very different from what the Spirit of God in ſcripture means, and expreſſes by this term. According to theſe common notions, riches or greatneſs, and honour, muſt always go together. Whence it is, that ſo many ſcruple not to uſe the baſeſt, and moſt indirect means to become wealthy and great, becauſe they vainly fancy this is the only way to become honourable. But true honour is a quality of the mind, which riches cannot give, nor poverty take away. It is ſuch a fixed and ſteady principle in a man's own breaſt, as does not depend upon any outward, or accidental advantages, but is grounded on the love and fear of God, and a regard to truth and virtue; and is indeed what entitles a man to be called Good rather than Great. Such a man as this is at the ſame time truly great, both in the eyes of God, and of all good men. His ſpirit is above the temptations of power or wealth, when they are not conſiſtent with his religion. He deſpiſes any fortune at the expence of his integrity; thinks nothing can be for his advancement, that

is not alſo for his commendation; and diſclaims all poſſeſſions that cannot be held, without wounding his conſcience, and bringing diſgrace upon the owner. This is the man of a truly great and generous ſpirit; who ſcorns to owe his greatneſs to any baſe, indirect means, or to employ it to any unlawful or unworthy end. Whereas, the low, impotent, narrow ſoul is impatient to be great, without any regard to being honeſt; never conſidering, that the higher he riſes in this way, is the expoſing himſelf the more; and making him eminent only to his own ſhame. And truly, when a man thus haſtes to be rich, his eſtate is very often as haſty as himſelf. His wealth and greatneſs frequently make to themſelves wings and fly away; and leave nothing but an afflicting ſting behind them. Whereas the man who looks upon his wealth with an indifference of mind, and is not dazzled with its luſtre, but accounts it ſo far good, as it is well gotten, and well employed; this man turns his riches into an everlaſting inheritance, and makes that inheritance to be a bleſſing. And when this is the caſe, proſperity is not only a lawful

lawful but a commendable ſtate; even ſuch a ſtate as is commended in my text, for honourable, by the Holy Ghoſt. It is the bleſſing of God upon our honeſt endeavours, and the natural reward of lawful induſtry; it is what a good man may deſire with moderation, and reflect upon with comfort. To ſee all things proſper which he takes in hand; and the hand of God ſeconding all his labour; ſurely this muſt inſpire him with gratitude and devotion towards the Giver of his good gifts, and make him rejoice more in his divine favour than that his corn and wine and oil increaſe. It gives him a generous, commanding ſpirit; a ſuperiority over thoſe very bleſſings which he enjoys; and teaches him the true, original uſe of the creatures, as God deſigned them; even that they ſhould be ſervants unto us, and not we ſlaves unto them. This is that greatneſs of ſpirit, that largeneſs of ſoul, which God expects from them to whom he has given large poſſeſſions. It is this only which ſtamps the character of honour upon a rich man; and makes his power to be a true image of his Maker. It is certain, indeed, that poverty has its peculiar

virtues; and the man, however poor, is truly honourable, whoſe ſpirit is above the frowns of fortune. But, 'tis a yet harder taſk, and therefore a greater honour, to be above the ſmiles of fortune, and to maintain one's religion and virtue, in ſpite of all the allurements of eaſe and pleaſure.

Adverſity has a natural tendency to awaken a man's reſolution, and put him upon his defence: and he who reſiſts may eaſily overcome. But proſperity comes upon men with ſubtilty and artifice; it undermines their virtue by its flatteries; betrays them into confidence, and ſelf-conceit; and ſoothes them gently into their ruin. In ſhort, it works itſelf ſo into their affections, and beguiles and blinds their reaſon by its inſinuating, deceitful careſſes, that nothing but an excellent ſpirit can find out the cheat; and he would need to be a mighty man in valour (I mean in a ſpiritual ſenſe) that can reſiſt the charm.

The uſe then we are to make of all theſe reflections is this:—If we are under the cloud of adverſity, let us remember that true greatneſs of mind can raiſe us above it, and preſerve our real honour,

honour, in the midſt of our greateſt diſtreſs. Or, if we are in the ſunſhine of proſperity, let us reflect, that true honour conſiſts not in outward greatneſs or wealth; but that the only way to be truly great is to be truly good.——And this leads me to another obſervation upon Naaman's character as it is given us in the text;—his employing the might and valour which God had given him in the defence of his country, and promoting the public good.

Every man ought to ſtudy the public good, according to the abilities, more or leſs, which God hath entruſted him with. And no man, to whom God has given the uſe of his reaſon, is ſo inconſiderable in a commonwealth or ſociety, but he may contribute ſomething to its advantage and preſervation. He may, for example, be an inſtrument, either of reconciling its differences, or of foreſeeing, and forewarning it of its dangers;—he may promote or adviſe its peace and proſperity;—or, if he can do nothing elſe, he can at leaſt pray for it. And if he is a truly pious, good man, his fervent prayer to God may be more effectual for its preſervation and advantage, than the

counſels of the wiſeſt irreligious Achitophel. So that, as Solomon expreſſes it, "*even a poor man may ſave a city, as* "*well as a mighty man in valour.*"—Some may think, that acting with a view to the public good may indeed be their worldly intereſt, and a thing that concerns them in point of human policy, but that it is no part of religion, nor to be preſſed upon them in that light.—But who can imagine, that the Holy Ghoſt ſhould give ſo honourable a character of Naaman, only for proſecuting his own intereſt; or that his worldly policy would have made him ſuch a noted favourite of Heaven, as that God would have made him his ſpecial inſtrument in delivering his country; or intereſted his providence ſo much as he did, in bringing about his converſion?—We need not doubt but God himſelf is more ſolicitous for the public good, than for any man's private advantage: and therefore it is our duty to be ſo too.—It is our duty to have a principal regard to the welfare of our country, a generous compaſſion for the ſufferings of our brethren, and a common concern for the good of all mankind; and not think that we were

born only to pleaſe ourſelves, or that any portion of the good things of this life, was beſtowed upon us, to be wholly ſpent upon our own entertainment.—'Tis a ſmall thing to preſerve our own lives, and a little labour would ſuffice to ſatisfy the neceſſities of nature: and we do not therefore admire and honour the rich, merely for his gay cloathing, or becauſe he himſelf fares ſumptuouſly every day;—but it is then, and then only, that he gets, or deſerves ſincere reſpect and true honour, when he feeds the hungry, and clothes the naked;—when he ſupports the weak, protects the innocent, and encourages the induſtrious;—when he lifts them up with his hand, defends them with a ſtretched-out arm, and ſupplies the place of God himſelf, in undertaking the protection of his creatures.—This is truly honourable, and indeed all that is honourable in man, be his wealth ever ſo great, or his ſtation ever ſo eminent in the world.

It is indeed a commendable thing for a man to make proviſion for his own houſe, and have a due regard for poſterity. But he who thinks to ſecure his own private intereſt at the expence of the public, begins at the wrong end of

his work, and builds his houſe without laying the foundation: and for the moſt part his building fares accordingly.—We have even ſeen ſome inſtances of this: and we have heard or read of many more, where men, regardleſs of the public good, have even taken the opportunity of the general diſtreſs and danger of their country, to purſue only their own private ends, and amaſs wealth for themſelves and their poſterity.—When behold! ſome notable judgment has ſuddenly overtaken them, either in their perſons, their families, or their eſtates; and God has blaſted all their deſigns, and returned their wickedneſs upon their own head. We have ſeveral examples of this recorded in ſcripture, as ſo many beacons or warnings to us, to beware of indulging ſuch a narrow, contracted, ſelfiſh ſpirit, in any degree. See, for inſtance, what became of the churliſh Nabal, when he refuſed to entertain the ſervants of David, who had been fighting the battles of the Lord *.—The hiſtory and fate of Gehazi, as recorded in this very chapter, is another ſtriking inſtance.—Though his country, it would ſeem, was

* 1. Sam. xxv.

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in danger, he thought of nothing but Naaman's preſents, and how to lay the foundation of a fair eſtate for himſelf and his poſterity. " *Is this a time,*" ſaid the prophet to him, " *to receive money,* " *and garments, and olive-yards, and vine-* " *yards, and ſheep, and oxen, and men ſer-* " *vants, and maid-ſervants.—The leproſy* " *therefore of Naaman ſhall cleave unto* " *thee, and to thy ſeed for ever.*" A proper reward, truly, for a coveting, itching, ſcraping man.—And, God knows, there are but too many in the world ſtill, whoſe ſelfiſh deſigns and practices too well deſerve Gehazi's cenſure, though they have the fortune to eſcape his diſeaſe; who not only make their advantage of public calamities when they come, ſuch as war, ſcarcity, and dearth, and the like; but even try to bring on, aggravate, and increaſe ſuch calamities, that they may make wealth for themſelves in the ruins of their neighbour or country. —Surely no character is black enough to deſcribe the guilt of ſuch perſons; nor any diſeaſe too foul for their puniſhment.—In all ages and places of the world, we read of public monuments and ſtatues erected for the honour,

and public proviſion often made for the maintenance of thoſe who have diſtinguiſhed themſelves in promoting the public good: but as for them whoſe ambition reached no higher than the raiſing of their fortunes, and leaving behind them a great eſtate, we find only ſome ſlight remembrance left of a very few of them, and that ſeldom without reproach.—And ſuch is the caſe, in the oppoſite characters here ſet before us.

What can be more deſpicable than the memory of Gehazi, that little, avaricious Jew, who thought of nothing but to make a trade of his religion?—And on the other hand, what can be ſaid more honourable of a man, than what is here recorded of Naaman the Syrian,—that by him God had given deliverance to his country? It is a glorious thing, in any caſe, to be the inſtrument of God; that we ſhould work by his appointment, and he ſhould work by our hands;—but 'tis ſtill more glorious to be his inſtrument for good, and that he ſhould derive bleſſings to others of his creatures, through our hands, and by the means of our endeavours.——From all which we may learn many uſeful leſſons,

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but more eſpecially theſe two, with which I ſhall conclude my preſent diſcourſe. 1ſt. That whatever ſociety we may happen any of us to be a member of, we ſhould always prefer the common good to our own particular humour or intereſt.—For, whatever men of narrow, ſelfiſh, or even proud and ambitious ſpirits may imagine, this is the ſureſt way to honour and reſpect, as well as the ſafeſt way for one's own private intereſt. For, though a proud, over-bearing man, may think to over-top his neighbours, and may ſeem to do ſo in ſome reſpects, by his wealth and power, and by oppreſſing or undermining others; and though ſuch perſons will never want flatterers, to ſoothe them in their pride, and make them believe that all the world reſpects, honours, and loves them, as much as they do themſelves; — yet certain it is, that the man who is moſt eminently and truly uſeful, the man who is ſo generous and diſintereſted as on all occaſions to prefer the common good to his own particular and private advantage;—he it is who will poſſeſs the higheſt degree of the real eſteem, love, and honour of his neighbours;—he it is, whom they will look

upon as truly great and honourable, and whoſe memory will continue longeſt among them. 2dly. Another leſſon we may learn from what I have ſaid on this ſubject, is;—that however great or uſeful we may be, or whatever good we may do to others, we are only God's inſtruments: and therefore, as all our ability to do good flows originally from him; and the continuance of it depends entirely on his pleaſure; ſo all the honour of it, is conſtantly to be aſcribed to him; and every man, to keep himſelf duly humble and thankful, ſhould often aſk himſelf theſe queſtions; "*Who maketh thee to differ?*" or "*what haſt thou that thou haſt not re-*" "*ceived?*"

God imprint theſe truths upon our hearts, that the fruit of them may appear.

DIS-

DISCOURSE III.

THE FORMER SUBJECT CONTINUED.

2. KINGS V. 1.

Now Naaman, captain of the hoſt of the king of Syria, was a great man with his maſter, and honourable, becauſe by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria; he was alſo a mighty man of valour; but he was a leper.

PROPOSING to make ſome obſervations on the hiſtory of Naaman, as recorded in this chapter, in my former diſcourſe I conſidered him in his proſperous ſtate, as deſcribed in my text—He was a great man with his maſter, and honourable, becauſe by him the Lord had given deliverance to his country—he was alſo a mighty man of valour.—Here in this character and account of Naaman is all that could make a man great and happy. And in diſcourſing on this point, I endeavoured to ſhew what it is that makes a man truly great and honourable in the eyes of God, and of all wiſe and good men;—that it is not the outward ad-

vantages of fortune, but that inward greatneſs, generoſity, and goodneſs of heart, which is grounded on the love, and the fear of God, and a firm regard to truth and virtue, and which ſets a man above the frowns of adverſity, and preſerves him from being corrupted by the ſmiles of proſperity.—I ſhewed likewiſe, that Naaman became great and honourable, both with his ſovereign and people, by employing his talents in the ſervice of his country. From which I took occaſion to diſcourſe a little upon the obligations every man is under to ſhew a public ſpirit, and promote the public good of the ſociety whereof he is a member, ſo far as God has given him ability and opportunity.—This was one of the inferences with which I concluded my diſcourſe; and the other was, That when Providence puts it into our power to be of any remarkable uſe or ſervice to our neighbours, or to our country, we ſhould nevertheleſs always remember, that we are but God's inſtruments; that the power of doing good proceeds wholly from him, and depends entirely upon his pleaſure; and therefore, that we muſt beware of arrogating the praiſe or merit of it to ourſelves,

ſelves, but ſhould aſcribe it, ultimately and chiefly at leaſt, to the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift.

Having thus conſidered Naaman in his proſperous ſtate, let us now conſider him in his affliction, and ſee what uſeful obſervations we may raiſe to ourſelves from his diſtemper and diſtreſs. He was a great, honourable, and mighty man; — but he was a leper. A nauſeous, afflicting diſeaſe had ſeized upon his fleſh, which was ſuch an abatement upon his ſpirit, ſuch a diminution of his happineſs, as all his maſter's favour could not recompenſe, and all his hoſt could not drive away. 'Twas ſuch a perplexing, prevailing evil, as, in ſpite of all his honours and preferments, muſt needs render him unſerviceable in the field, unwelcome in the court, and uneaſy even to himſelf.—In ſhort, his body was ſo tormented, and his ſoul ſo perplexed with this nauſeous diſeaſe, that all his victories and ſucceſs could yield him no ſatisfaction; but go he muſt, from the country he had ſo well defended, to a foreign, hateful nation, as the only place where he could find a cure.—There is nothing nearer to a man than his own ſkin; nothing is, naturally,

turally, dearer to him than his fleſh; inſomuch that all the proſperity and pleaſure of the world can neither remove, nor recompenſe an evil that cleaves ſo cloſe unto him. "*Touch but his bone and his* "*fleſh,*" ſaid the Devil, ſpeaking of Job, "*and he will curſe thee to thy face.*" And though Job diſappointed the Devil in this, yet it muſt be confeſſed that Satan had ſome ſort of reaſon to gueſs as he did, from the frame of human nature, and from his experience of what wild, irrational, and even ſinful things men are often tempted to do and ſay, when in the agony of tormenting pain. And accordingly we may obſerve of Job himſelf, that though he did bear up with great fortitude and preſence of mind againſt all the ravages that were made upon his family and eſtate, yet, when the malice of the Devil fixed upon his body, and touched him to the quick, then his great ſpirit began to ſink; and though he did not curſe God himſelf, yet his wife wondered how he could forbear: nay, for all his patience, and a moſt eminent inſtance of it to be ſure he was, yet human weakneſs got the better of it ſo far, that he bitterly curſed the day of his own birth.—

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How vexatious then, how intolerable a thing muſt it be to a man like Naaman, in the height of all his pomp and triumphs, to carry theſe thorns and briars in his ſkin, which the weight of his ſtately robes about him would but drive the deeper into his fleſh, and nearer to his heart! And yet, ſuch things as theſe are commonly the effects of plenty and proſperity, and a flouriſhing eſtate: for that is ſometimes the natural cauſe of our diſtempers, and ſometimes, nay I believe very often, the moral cauſe of them.—When men live at eaſe and in fulneſs, and allow themſelves to pamper their bodies with ſloth and luxury, this, in its ordinary, natural courſe, brings trouble upon their loins; and their affliction may, in this ſenſe, be ſaid to ſpring out of the ground that feeds them. Sometimes, again, men's luxury and extravagance bring a judgment upon them for their rebuke; and their affliction, whatever may ſeem to be the immediate cauſe of it, comes down from Heaven.—God corrects one man for the reclaiming of his folly, and another for the puniſhing of his vice: and no man enjoys ſo perfect ſerenity, ſo calm a life, but he often finds a cloud hanging

hanging over him; and all his gaiety diſturbed and overcaſt.

Such is the nature of all human greatneſs;—ſo deceitful and inconſtant a thing is this world, and ſo vain it is for a man to build his happineſs upon the goods and enjoyments of it! And indeed, when we think of it ſeriouſly, this may be enough to convince us, that if we would be truly happy, we muſt ſeek for ſomething elſe to make us ſo than the preſent life can afford. For this life is ſo clogged with inconveniencies, ſo ſubject to changes, and what we commonly call Chance, that it yields nothing of moment or certainty enough for us to depend upon; but when we are arrived to the very height of our expectation, we find ſome unexpected accident that daſhes all our hopes to pieces; ſome one unlucky drop that embitters all our cup, and takes off the reliſh of all our enjoyments.—For we ſee the very greateſt men, juſt like Ahab with Naboth's vineyard, if they want but one of ten thouſand conveniencies, they can neither ſleep nor eat;—they think more upon this one thing, which they fancy they need, than upon all the innumerable things

things which they poſſeſs.—In a word, the Divine Author of nature hath ſo ordered it, that there is nothing perfect upon earth; but a mixture of good and evil runs through the whole compoſition of our life; and if we weigh the one againſt the other, we ſhall not find ſo very great reaſon to envy thoſe whom we ſee above us, or to prefer one ſtate or condition of life to another ſo much as we commonly do.—For the ſimple natural pleaſures of life are as open to one ſtate as to another; and the ſlave that waits at the door of the tent, may be, nay ſometimes is, as happy a man as the captain or general of the hoſt, who lodges in it.—Alas! little do the generality of men think how vain and fantaſtic are all the purſuits of avarice and ambition, thoſe two reſtleſs unhappy principles that ſo much diſturb the peace of the world, and occaſion ſuch a variety of calamities and misfortunes to the ſons of men! — Little do they conſider, though the fact be manifeſt from daily experience, that the higher one's ſtation is, the more he is expoſed to ſtorms and dangers; and that the more any one has been uſed to pleaſure, the leſs he is able

to bear pain. And though an ambitious ſpirit, who has not had a trial of ſuch a ſtate, may vainly fancy that there is no happineſs like being great; and that to a great man no happineſs can be wanting; yet, when he comes to make the experiment, he commonly finds himſelf miſerably diſappointed, and, inſtead of being ſatisfied, is abſolutely ſorry for the change.—Whilſt David was a private man, and employed himſelf in feeding of the ſheep, how eaſy, and happy, and melodious was his life!—But no ſooner did he appear in a higher ſphere;—no ſooner was he called to attend the king, and reſide at court, than his troubles began; and when he was raiſed ſtill higher, and employed to feed the people, we ſee his charge and his danger increaſed in proportion to his advancement.—Had he continued in his firſt and private ſtation, it is highly probable the ſon of his own bowels, and of his affections too, would never have rebelled againſt him, or ſought to drive him from his own houſe.—When we ſee a man's ſucceſs anſwerable to his hopes; when we ſee him baſking in the ſunſhine of proſperity, and every thing, as we imagine, falling out accord-

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ing to his heart's deſire, how ready are we to envy his condition, and to fancy, that, if we ourſelves were in ſuch a ſtate, nothing in the world could poſſibly diſturb us? and yet, all the while, this ſeemingly happy man may have ſome unaccountable ſecret vexation lurking in his ſoul, ſome vexatious diſtemper afflicting his body, or ſome inſuperable burden annexed to his eſtate, that ſhall effectually deject him in the height of his advancement, and make him bewail and lament himſelf, when all the world beſides is either congratulating his happineſs, or envying his ſucceſs. So falſe a judgment are we apt to make, when we look upon the outward appearances of things! We look at nothing but the ſeeming advantages of a great man's condition; never conſidering the diſadvantages or inconveniencies that attend it, and far leſs the general mutability and uncertainty of that and every thing upon earth. But why ſhould any man in his right wits be fond of ſuch a ſtation, that is ſo much expoſed to change and chance?—Why ſhould men labour, and diſtreſs themſelves ſo much as they do, in getting the riches of this world, which,

which, when they have got them, they are not ſure to keep; or, if they could keep them, yet, God knows, they are not worth the keeping.—They do but lead us into inconveniencies, and there they leave us; and all the riches in the world may only cauſe a leproſy, but can never cure it.—A little more pleaſure, or a little more wealth, is that which fills all our heads, and employs all our hands: and yet, if, inſtead of a little more, we had a little leſs, perhaps it might be much better for us.—We pray for proſperity and honour; or at leaſt, if we have not the aſſurance to fall on our knees, and beg thoſe things formally of God, we nevertheleſs long and wiſh for them in our hearts, which is much the ſame thing; but in this caſe, like the ſons of Zebedee, we pray or wiſh for we know not what; becauſe, for any thing we know, a bitter cup may go along with our advancement;—a leproſy may be entailed on our eſtate, that will quickly make us repent our wiſh, and be deſirous to exchange again. — You ſee, the diſeaſed Naaman would have gladly given ten talents of gold, and many good things beſides, for his cure: And

who, that had laboured all his life to get a fortune, and at the ſame time laboured under a diſeaſe, would not at laſt be glad to reſign up the one, in hopes to cure the other?—The truth is, proſperity, or what men commonly call ſo, i. e. wealth and abundance; this, I ſay, even when it comes moſt eaſily and diſengaged, is but like a troubleſome, ſtately gueſt; it brings ſuch a train of cares and diſtractions with it, that it ſpoils the honour of the viſit, and takes quite off the pleaſure of the entertainment. It is like the poſſeſſion of a great eſtate with ſo many incumbrances, or ſuch a load of debt upon it, as eats out all the profit. And therefore, were it in every man's power to follow his own inclinations, what man is there of tolerable good ſenſe or wiſdom, who would not chuſe a competent retirement, a comfortable and ſafe retreat, where he might enjoy his health, his pleaſure, his God, his friend, and himſelf, and live free from the noiſe, the trouble, and the dangers which await upon the buſy, or the mighty man? Were not men obliged, both by reaſon and religion, to ſacrifice their own eaſe and ſatisfaction to the public good, who would not (if

he could) ſit down under his own vine and his own fig-tree; yea, who would not retire, even to a wilderneſs, rather than appear in any public ſtation whatever, and there be obliged to ſtand the brunt of the malice of his enemies, and the envy and detraction of his pretended friends! And indeed, there have been many inſtances of men, in the higheſt ſtations and moſt flouriſhing conditions of life, who have reſigned even empires, and renounced all the falſe pleaſures of power and ambition, to rid themſelves of the inconveniencies which are inſeparable from ſuch a ſtate. Nay, it is always the practice of the greateſt princes in the world, and of thoſe great men who wallow in wealth and power, when they want to enjoy themſelves to purpoſe; it is their practice, I ſay, to lay aſide all the circumſtances and badges of their ſtate, all their pomp and pageantry, all their ambition, power, and pre-eminence, and reduce themſelves as much as poſſible to the condition of private men; becauſe this is the only way to come at the enjoyment of thoſe pleaſures that are alone natural and true.

Upon the whole then, from this circumſtance

cumſtance of Naaman's being a leper, the rich or great man, and the poor; the mighty and the humble, may equally draw moſt uſeful and inſtructing leſſons. The mighty man may learn to be humble, and the humble or poor man not to repine. Are we in a proſperous and flouriſhing ſtate, healthy in body, and eaſy in mind? Let us not, however, forget either God or ourſelves. Let us remember, that the higheſt degree of human greatneſs cannot ſecure any man from the common infirmities of human nature, nor yet from the croſſes and calamities which God may ſee fit to viſit us with, in order to keep down the natural pride of our hearts, and make our worldly enjoyments more wholeſome and more ſafe.—And, on the other hand, if we enjoy many worldly comforts and conveniencies, but at the ſame time are actually expoſed to ſome particular and great diſtreſs, let us adore the wiſdom and goodneſs of Divine Providence, in thus tempering both our bleſſings and our croſſes; for, if they were without ſuch a mixture of good and evil, the one might lead us into preſumption, or the other into deſpair.

Again; are we in a poor and mean condition? Here then, from the conſideration of Naaman's caſe, we may learn not to envy the rich and great. Their very greatneſs, as I have been ſhewing, ſubjects them to many diſtreſſes, diſaſters, and inconveniencies, which we ſee; and they have often many croſſes and thorns galling them, which we ſee not, and which their wealth and greatneſs may render more ſharp or inſupportable, but can in no wiſe contribute to their eaſe and relief. Let us endeavour then to learn, with St. Paul, that great and important leſſon, *In whatever ſtate we are, therewith to be content.*— And moreover, from this circumſtance of Naaman's leproſy, let all of us, both rich and poor, learn, when we ſee any of our brethren labouring under any grievous diſeaſe, or bodily infirmity, never to deſpiſe them on that account; and far leſs to over-value or exalt ourſelves in our own eyes, as if we were greater favourites of Heaven than they, becauſe God has exempted us from ſufferings ſuch as theirs; for theſe afflictions are often the expreſſions, not of God's hatred,

but

but of his love: and had not Naaman been a leper, he might very probably have continued an infidel, and never have come to the knowledge of the true God.

DISCOURSE IV.

THE FORMER SUBJECT CONTINUED.

2. KINGS v. 1.

Now Naaman, captain of the hoſt of the king of Syria, was a great man with his maſter, and honourable, becauſe by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria; he was alſo a mighty man of valour; but he was a leper.

IN my former diſcourſes on this ſubject, I conſidered Naaman, 1ſt, As in a ſtate of proſperity; a mighty man of valour, great in the eyes of his prince, and honourable in the ſight of his countrymen; God having made him a ſpecial inſtrument, it would ſeem, in delivering the Syrians from their enemies. Then, 2dly, I conſidered this great and mighty man in his ſtate of affliction, perplexed in his ſoul, and tor-

mented in his body with a nauſeous diſeaſe, which no human art could cure, or ſo much as alleviate; ſo that, finding no relief at home, he was forced, no doubt much againſt his inclination, to go to another country for a cure, even a country which he hated, and very probably had been fighting againſt.

On each of theſe heads I made ſuch obſervations, and drew ſuch inferences from them, as I thought would be moſt profitable, and ſhew us how we ought to behave ourſelves, whether in a proſperous or adverſe ſtate. Let us now proceed to conſider Naaman's cure; and when we have done that, and weighed all the conſequences of it, we ſhall ſoon perceive that we have not ſo great reaſon to pity his diſeaſe, as perhaps we might imagine; but, that what ſeemed to be his miſery, was in reality his mercy; that it was to his leproſy he owed his health, and that it was the anguiſh of his body which ſaved his ſoul. Such a ſecret over-ruling providence attends a virtuous, a truly honourable man, that God often raiſes comfort to him out of his greateſt afflictions, and, if I may ſo expreſs it, diſappoints him into happineſs.

— But,

—But, let us take a more particular view of ſome of the moſt remarkable circumſtances of this cure, becauſe there is an unſpeakable deal of inſtruction couched in every one of them.

A party of Syrians had made an inroad into the land of Iſrael, and had brought away captive a little maid, whom Naaman's wife had got for a ſlave, to wait upon her. And to all appearance, what was there extraordinary in all this? ſo would the natural man ſay; the man who looks no higher than to the operation of ſecond cauſes. But if we look at this event with the eye of faith, we ſhall here perceive (juſt as in the parallel hiſtory of Joſeph) the hand of Infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs directing and conducting this ſeeming chance to the greateſt good: and, as a ſmall chink may let in great light, and very ſlender beginnings have often given birth to the moſt conſiderable events; ſo here, a poor ſlave brings ſalvation to this great man's houſe.—And indeed, in the weakneſs of worldly cauſes, we often ſee moſt clearly the ſuperior wiſdom and omnipotence of God, who frequently chooſes the fooliſh things of the world,

on purpoſe to confound the wiſe; and the weak things of the world, to confound the things that are mighty.—But to proceed: This true daughter of Abraham, though ſhe had loſt her liberty, had not loſt her faith, but knew that there was a God in Iſrael, whoſe Prophet had power to heal her maſter. Nor had her captivity embittered her ſpirit towards the family which ſhe ſerved. Though her perſon was enſlaved, her mind and her charity were free. She makes no conditions for herſelf, no bargain for her own releaſe, but ſeems only ſolicitous for her maſter's good. A noble generoſity!—a moſt diſintereſted benevolence, truly!—and ſuch as few friends, and yet fewer ſervants, would now-a-days, I am afraid, imitate. I ſay it again, there are but few Chriſtian ſervants ſo faithful to their Chriſtian maſters, as this Jew, this little ſlave, was to her heathen lord. And indeed, from the general concern expreſſed by all Naaman's ſervants for his welfare and recovery;—as, firſt this little maid's wiſh, then another's readineſs to report what ſhe ſaid, and afterwards the ſeaſonable advice of his attendants to comply with the

the prophet's order;—I ſay, from all theſe circumſtances, we have reaſon to believe, that Naaman was extremely happy in the love and fidelity of his domeſtics. And we may preſume likewiſe, that this happineſs was owing in a great meaſure to certain virtues, which endeared him ſo much to his whole family. Indeed, the only ſure bond and cement of domeſtic peace and happineſs, is a mutual benevolence, and a faithful diſcharge of our reſpective duties towards one another; for he is certainly a worthleſs maſter who will be unkind or unjuſt to a faithful obedient ſervant: and he is no leſs worthleſs a ſervant, who will be croſs or unfaithful to a juſt, kind, and gentle maſter.—But to go on with the hiſtory. Naaman, perſuaded by this young maid's report, and having likewiſe, it is highly probable, heard of the fame of Eliſha from others, ſets out on his journey, with a letter of recommendation from his maſter, and takes with him a ſet of preſents in money, and other things, ſuch as was ſuitable to his own high rank, and to the greatneſs of the favour which he expected. — Thus worldly men, whoſe faith is weak and imperfect,

imperfect, have always recourſe to worldly means to accompliſh their ends, and that even in ſpiritual things and the concerns of religion; till God in his mercy opens their eyes more fully, and lets them ſee, that in all ſuch caſes as theſe, human power, or worldly wealth and policy, are but mere vanity.—Jehoram, the then king of Iſrael, like his father Ahab, had forſaken the true God; and therefore, when he received the king of Syria's letter, thought not of his prophet, or of the power that God had given him to do many things above the pitch of natural cauſes. Yet in this he was ſo far modeſt, as to confeſs his own weakneſs and inability to do any thing in ſuch a caſe; and that as none but God could kill or make alive, ſo nothing leſs than divine power could cure a diſeaſe, that was naturally incurable.—And now from this I might take occaſion to obſerve unto you the difference between the eccleſiaſtic and the civil power, the church and the king. The temporal authority extends only to temporal things. But as to the power and office of the clergy, though their perſons and properties are ſubject to the civil magiſtrate, as much as thoſe of others,

others, yet in the exerciſe of their function, and in all acts purely ſpiritual, they are wholly independent on the ſtate. The king of Iſrael was conſcious that he was no prophet, that he had no ſupernatural powers; therefore, rends his cloaths, and complains of mal-treatment, when applied to in a matter that belonged not to his province. But Eliſha, who was duly inveſted with thoſe ſupernatural powers, deſires the caſe might be turned over to him: and ſo the king ſends the leper to the prophet, which was all he could do. —It is the prerogative and honour of the regal office to maintain and defend the church; to point out, by their laws, which is the true; together with the way and the guides which lead thereto. But to admit into this heavenly kingdom, to make us members of Chriſt by baptiſm, and cure the leproſy of ſin, is a privilege that belongs only to the prieſtly office. But not to inſiſt on this;—Naaman being thus ſent to Eliſha, the prophet well knew that he had an inward, ſpiritual diſeaſe, which needed to be cured, full as much as his bodily diſtemper; even that pride which is ſo deeply rooted in our corrupt nature, and which is the chief

ſource

ſource of all our deadly ſins. Eliſha therefore treated him accordingly, and took ſtate upon himſelf, that he might humble this proud Syrian. He doth not ſay, as this great man no doubt expected, —I will come to him—but, "*let him come* "*to me.*" And ſtill more than that; even when he came to the prophet's door, he does not vouchſafe to ſee him, but ſends him his orders by a ſervant. This had proved too hard a trial for Naaman, had he liſtened only to the advice of pride; and had that prevailed, he had never been cleanſed. — And here indeed we have a moſt lively repreſentation of the ſtruggle between Nature and Grace, and the different workings of the Fleſh and the Spirit. Natural men look no farther than natural cauſes: they ſee not, nor expect any other effects, than what the ordinary courſe and event of things are wont to produce. They ſee only the creature; for they want both eyes and light to ſee the Creator, even the eye of faith, and the illumination of the Holy Ghoſt. Such men, therefore, upon all occaſions, think and reaſon juſt as Naaman did; "*Are not Abana and* "*Pharpar, rivers of Damaſcus, better than* "*all*

" *all the waters of Iſrael?*" They pretend to know nature in all its ſhapes, and to make nature their only rule. This is that philoſophy, which the Apoſtle juſtly calls *vain* *. For, however right philoſophy may be, in defining the operations of nature, it is ſtark blind as to thoſe of grace; and therefore vain and unprofitable, when it pretends to go beyond its own limits or extent. The wiſdom of this world is but a falſe, or incompetent guide in heavenly things: it treats with contempt the ſuperior efficacy of grace; or thinks itſelf affronted, when any thing is offered, that is above its ſphere. It is wroth, and turns away in a rage from the prophet that recommends any ſpiritual matter; and rejects all, as fooliſh and impertinent, which ſuits not with its own prejudices. This is what the men of this world, the fine Athenian wits of the age, call Reaſon; and this attachment to their own miſguided and ill-informed reaſon, is the great ſtumbling block or rock of offence, at which they ſtumble, when the doctrines of faith are propoſed to them.

But if the conduct of Naaman, before his waſhing, repreſents to us the common practice of all carnal men, the example

* Col. ii. 8.

of

of his better-adviſed obedience ſhould be ſtill more inſtructive to us. After much ſtruggle, you ſee, he humbles himſelf to the voice of the prophet; yea he wiſely ſubmits to the prudent counſel of his own ſervants; and by thus conquering his pride, found the cure of his diſeaſe.— And in this procedure we may likewiſe obſerve, that the prophet acted here as the type and repreſentative of Chriſt, who ſends all that are yet without the pale of his church, to the waters of baptiſm;— none muſt come within his gates, till they waſh and be clean. Naaman, with his horſes and his chariot, ſtood at the door of Eliſha; he was not allowed to enter. No human grandeur, no wealth, nor honours, nor wordly means or conſiderations whatever; nothing, in a word, but Chriſtian Baptiſm, can procure admiſſion into the houſe and family of Chriſt. "*He* "*that believeth and is baptized, ſhall be* "*ſaved:*" and, "*Except a man be born* "*again, of water and of the Holy Ghoſt, he* "*cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*"— What an unhappy prejudice then muſt it be, for thoſe who live under the full light of the goſpel, to deſpiſe or reject this divine inſtitution, and ſo forfeit the ineſtimable

mable benefits of it? To this purpoſe our Lord applies this miraculous cure of a heathen and ſtranger; and remarks the great blindneſs and perverſeneſs of thoſe Jews, who remained inſenſible to the offers of his grace; while others, who were aliens, the publicans and ſinners, came in, and took as it were the kingdom of heaven by violence. "*Many lepers*," ſaith he, "*were in Iſrael, in the time of* "*Eliſeus the prophet, and none of them were* "*cleanſed, ſaving Naaman the Syrian.*"— The grace of God is free; is not due to any man, either by his nature or his merit; but God beſtows and diſpenſes it according to the good diſpoſition of the will and the ſincerity of the heart: and therefore, they who obſtinately diſobey his commands, or deſpiſe his inſtitutions, can have no claim to it.—But to proceed: The next circumſtance that attracts our obſervation in this ſtory, is Naaman's gratitude; a virtue in itſelf moſt natural and rational; and yet, alas! nothing rarer to be found, even among thoſe of the houſehold of faith, eſpecially towards God. Of ten lepers whom our Lord cured, but one returned to acknowledge his cure, and give glory to God, and he was a ſtranger.

And

And here, a Syrian ſtranger is thankful for his double cure, his leproſy and idolatry; but we hear not of one Iſraelite profited by the miracle, or the example; not even the prophet's own ſervant. On the contrary, we may rather obſerve, thoſe whom mercy and pardon of ſin does not melt into thankfulneſs and praiſe, it commonly hardens. We muſt be firſt truly penitent, before we can be grateful or thankful.—But not to inſiſt on this, we may obſerve, next, that the cure of Naaman's leproſy proved at the ſame time the cure of his idolatry. He reſolved henceforth to worſhip none but the true God; and therefore begged two mules burden of Iſraelitiſh earth, to build an altar upon for that purpoſe; and at the ſame time (if our Engliſh tranſlation be right) petitions the prophet, that God would pardon any ſeeming idolatry he might be guilty of in the houſe of Rimmon, when attending upon his maſter. But ſeveral very eminent and learned divines have obſerved, that the original will here bear to be tranſlated in the perfect or paſt, full as well as in the preſent time: and therefore, that this paſſage ought to have been rendered thus: "*In this thing*

"*the*

" *the Lord pardon thy ſervant, that when*
" *my maſter went into the houſe of Rim-*
" *mon to worſhip there, and he leaned on*
" *my hand, and I bowed myſelf in the*
" *houſe of Rimmon; the Lord pardon thy*
" *ſervant in this thing.*" Idolatry being a crime ſo extremely groſs and hateful in the ſight of God, that Naaman thought himſelf obliged to make a particular confeſſion of his guilt in this reſpect, and beg the Divine mercy and forgiveneſs for it, in the moſt earneſt and particular manner. And this indeed ſeems to be vaſtly more conſiſtent with the truth, and with the prophet's principles and character, than our common tranſlation. For, could we ſuppoſe Eliſha giving him, as I may call it, a diſpenſation of this kind, to worſhip occaſionally in the houſe of Rimmon, how could we clear either the one or the other from hypocriſy and diſſimulation? Had Naaman's example, in this ſenſe, been made a precedent, Daniel and the three children, in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, and old Eleazar, amidſt Antiochus's officers, might have eſcaped perſecution. Shadrach, Meſhach, and Abed-nego, at the ſound of the muſical inſtruments, might have fallen down before

fore the image, not out of any principle of adoration, but in pure obedience to the king's orders. And many of the primitive Chriſtians might have eſcaped the moſt cruel deaths, if they had only ſuffered it to be atteſted that they had offered ſacrifice to idols, though they had not actually done ſo. But ſuch a piece of prevarication they always looked upon as unworthy of the ſincerity of a Chriſtian; and ſuch as were ſo weak as to be guilty of it, were expelled the communion of the church, till they gave ſufficient evidence of their repentance. Let us conſider then how inconſiſtent with ſincerity it would have been in Naaman, with the ſame breath that he renounced idolatry, to profeſs his readineſs to relapſe into the ſame crime, and to deſire God's pardon for it before hand: whereas, to aſk pardon for what he had done amiſs, and to deſire the prophet's interceſſion with God in that behalf, this argued a mind truly ſenſible of his former tranſgreſſion, and very much reſolved to avoid it for the future; ſo that Eliſha gave him a favourable anſwer, and bade him "*go in peace.*"

And now, to conclude my obſervations on this piece of ſacred hiſtory; we have ſeen,

ſeen, as I obſerved in the beginning of this diſcourſe, that Naaman's leproſy occaſioned his converſion from his idolatry: what then ſhould this teach us, but to receive with patience, nay even with thankfulneſs, whatever comes to us from the hand of God, ſince the moſt grievous afflictions here may be moſt conducive to our eternal happineſs hereafter?—But alas! how contrary to this is our common behaviour? If the courſe of our life does not run ſmooth, and as we would have it, we preſently repine, and think ourſelves undone. An eaſy fortune, and a pleaſant life, we account an argument of God's kindneſs to us, and think thoſe are the greateſt favourites of Heaven, who enjoy the quieteſt portion upon earth. But ſo deceitful are our judgments, that the very contrary of this is true; and they are only God's beloved children whom he corrects: for virtue generally thrives beſt under a heavy hand; without which, the rankeſt weeds grow always in the richeſt ſoil: it was the wilderneſs that reformed, but Canaan that corrupted Iſrael. If eaſe and plenty could ſecure our eternal happineſs, we ſhould labour for plenty, and pray for eaſe; but if we find that they

they only betray us into ruin; if men's virtue commonly grows heavy, and their devotion cold, under the indulgent circumſtances of fortune, have we not much more need to beg, that God would uſe a ſeverer method, and bring us, like Naaman, to a ſenſe of religion, though it ſhould be through a ſenſe of pain? 'Tis thus that God adopts his children, and nurtures thoſe whom he pleaſes to call his friends. As for his enemies, he gives them up to their own devices, and their own deſires: and ſince a portion in this world is all they aſk, and 'tis all they are like to have, ſo indulgent a father is God, even to his moſt reprobate, prodigal ſons, that he divides unto them that portion which they requeſt, and leaves them to their own diſpoſal. Their falſe and ſinful hopes he feeds with falſe, deceitful joys; and gives them their hearts deſire, but ſends leanneſs withal into their ſouls.— Since, therefore, proſperity often proves the occaſion of a great man's fall, and adverſity always turns to a good man's advantage, let us leave it to God, the only proper judge, to chuſe for us that ſtate, which is moſt for our real intereſt. And if he ſhall ſee fit to deny us that eaſy

part

part which our vicious affections and ſlothful luſts prompt us to chooſe and wiſh for; if he ſhall ſee it neceſſary to extinguiſh thoſe pleaſures which ſtand in the way of religion, and to tear from us, with pain and violence, the idol of our hearts, whatever it be, which turns or keeps us from his ſervice; let us bleſs his mercy for thus chuſing for us better than we would for ourſelves; and let us chearfully ſubmit to thoſe preſent tranſient pains, which will deliver us at laſt from eternal torments.—May the Holy Spirit of God imprint theſe truths upon our minds, that the effect of them may appear in our life and converſation. May we be enabled, "*in whatever ſtate we are, therewith to be* "*content*," and to turn every diſpenſation of Providence to our everlaſting benefit and comfort.

DISCOURSE V.

EARLY PIETY

INCULCATED, AND RECOMMENDED.

ECCLES. xi. 9.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart chear thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment.

IN this book of Eccleſiaſtes, Solomon calls himſelf the Preacher; and thinks it no diſparagement to his royal dignity, to deſcend from governing, to inſtruct his people.—And he was accompliſhed for the diſcharge of this office in an extraordinary degree: God had bleſſed him with the greateſt wiſdom; the circumſtances of his reign had given him the greateſt experience in the world; and, after he had obſerved and tried

all the ſeveral courſes of human life, in this book he ſums up all his obſervations, for the honour of God, and the advantage of ſucceeding ages. — Here he has ſhewed us the true bounds of wiſdom and folly; what is profitable, and what is hurtful to the ſouls of men; the powerful inclinations which we have to vice, and the more powerful motives to virtue. Here the ways of God are faithfully related; the nature of man is perfectly deſcribed; and, above all, the neceſſary connexion between folly and repentance, between ſin and judgment, is exactly and movingly ſhewn: for, after wiſdom has done its beſt, and experience has convinced us of the folly and falſity of our ways, there is nothing but this doctrine of terrors that can perſuade us; nothing but puniſhment can effectually reſtrain our luſts; and it is not the vanity of ſin, but the vexation of ſpirit unavoidably following upon it, that muſt reclaim us.

All this is declared throughout the whole ſeries of this grave and excellent book; but more particularly in the words of my text: which are indeed principally directed to the young man; but

but yet they comprehend the whole compaſs of our life, and may ſerve for inſtruction to every age. They ſhew us how naturally our youth begins in folly, and how neceſſarily theſe follies of our youth lead us to repentance and bitter ſorrow in our riper years; but if we let that ſeaſon ſlip, and will, even then, ſtill run on in the ways of our own hearts, and be deluded and led away with the ſight of our eyes (which, alas! is too often the caſe with the old as well as the young) then my text ſhews us how unavoidably ſuch a continued courſe of ſin brings us to judgment at our latter end. *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart chear thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes.* Thus far my text ſpeaks comfortable things; things joyful and agreeable to the gayeſt and vaineſt young man; and had the Preacher ſtopt here, or ſpoke in earneſt, no doubt but every young man would become his proſelyte. But mark what follows: His next words are of a quite different ſtamp, and ſpeak a far other language; they check the young man in his career, and damp and diſcourage

him in the height of his enjoyments; they ſhew him the precipice and gulf on which his headſtrong courſes lead him, and bid him, as it were, ſtop ſhort and look before him, that ſo he may correct and retract his vain imaginations, before it is too late:—*But know, that for all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment.*—Therefore, it is our wiſdom to weigh both parts of my text deliberately, and chuſe that which we find of greateſt moment; Whether we will be always young, and go on to walk according to the ways of our heart and the ſight of our eyes, and run the riſque of the ſorrowful conſequences of ſuch a courſe; or, if we will govern our life according to the evidences of reaſon and religion, and the certain knowledge of a future judgment; if we will forego the vain joy of the ſinful pleaſures of this life, that we may ſecure to ourſelves the ſubſtantial and everlaſting comforts of the next.

Solomon has placed theſe two in my text, one againſt the other, and fairly laid them both before us: and, that we might not complain of an unfair repreſentation, as if the Preacher, now turned ſerious by age, had dealt partially in favour

vour of religion, we find here the pleaſures and delights of youth ſet off to the beſt advantage, and ſo heightened with all their commendations, as if the Preacher himſelf had inclined to the young man's ſide. Only at laſt he cuts them all off with one peremptory word, *But know*; and weighs them all down with only the name of Judgment; *But know, that for all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment.*

In the following diſcourſe, therefore, I ſhall conſider theſe two things:

1ſt, The natural inclinations of youth; and how ſtrongly they lead us into vanity:

And, 2dly, The curb that is put upon us by religion; and how much more reaſonable it is that we ſhould comply with the apprehenſions of a future judgment, than to walk in the ways of our own heart, and in the ſight of our own eyes.

As to the firſt of theſe—The inclinations of youth, and the vanity of thoſe inclinations, cannot be more lively or more elegantly expreſſed, than we find them in the former part of my text; wherein Solomon artificially expoſes the

humour of that age, and, by the very manner of his expreſſion, ſhews how it indulges its own fancy, lets fly at all diverſions that come within its reach, and affects nothing more than a boundleſs uninterrupted flow of pleaſures.—He well knew the natural heat and inconſiderateneſs of thoſe giddy years; how want of experience renders them incapable of advice, and impatient of all contradiction or reſtraint; how want of weight and ſolidity makes them launch out into the deep, with more ſail than ballaſt, and value themſelves only upon their ſpeed; how they diſdain the thoughts of being cautious, for fear of being accounted ſlow; and take a ſort of pride in leaving all prudence and conſideration behind their backs.—All this the Preacher knew, and therefore ſpeaks to the fool according to his folly. He does not attempt, at the very firſt, to ſtop the young man in his courſe, or to ſtem the current of his pleaſures; for he knew that was the way to make him purſue them more eagerly: therefore, he ſeems to give him his heart's deſire; allows him the full ſcope and ſwing of his luſts, and lets him fairly run to the utmoſt of his line:—Do, follow thy own inclinations,

inclinations, and ſee what will be the event and ſucceſs: *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart chear thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and the ſight of thine eyes.*—Here we have a goodly proſpect, which at firſt ſight, and at a diſtance, makes a glorious ſhew; but if we view it nearer, and examine the ſeveral branches of it ſeparately, we ſhall find it made up of ſuch dangerous precipices, ſuch fatal ruins, as will rather diſcourage a wiſe man's attempts, than invite his curioſity.

As, 1ſt, *Rejoice, O young man.* And, I ſuppoſe, moſt of us will be ready to ſay, Where is the harm of ſo doing? Is not youth a natural ſeaſon for joy and mirth? why then go about to debar the young man from it? To which I anſwer, That innocent chearfulneſs and mirth is not to be condemned in any age, far leſs in youth; and religion is ſo far from hindering or forbidding it, that, on the contrary, it is the only ſolid foundation and mean of it.—Religion is the only thing that can preſerve our own inward peace and tranquillity of heart; and the man who is thus ſound and ſerene in his own breaſt, will ſcarce fail to be chear-

ful, eaſy, and agreeable, both in his words and actions. Do not then miſtake the Preacher, in my text, as if he wanted to darken the human mind with a gloomy ſurlineſs, or imagined that a moderate purſuit of innocent pleaſures was any way inconſiſtent with true religion. No, this is not the joy he means; this is not the *rejoicing* he ſo ironically ſpeaks of: But what he means is, that ſenſual, ſinful joy; that heedleſs, intemperate, brutiſh courſe of life, which ſo many give themſelves up to, eſpecially in their youth, without the leaſt regard to reaſon or religion. And what is this, but folly inſtead of mirth, and madneſs inſtead of joy?—What is it, but ſuch a looſe inconſiderate habit of mind, as not only endangers the health of our ſouls, but is unbecoming and diſagreeable to our nature?—Through pangs we came into this world, and with our tears we firſt ſaluted the light; and from that time to the very agonies in which we muſt depart, there is nothing in this life that can warrant a wiſe man's ſetting his heart upon it, or taking great complacency or ſatisfaction in it.—The providence of God has diſpenſed unto every man his portion in this world, with a mixture

mixture of good and evil; and every prudent man is contented with that allay, and takes it as it comes:—But, if we ſeparate the bitter from the ſweet, and make our potion all luſcious and pleaſant in our youth; what ſhall we do when we come to the dregs, when all the bitterneſs remains ſettled at the bottom, and God himſelf puts trembling into our cup beſides?—It was well obſerved by a wiſe Heathen, that true joy is a ſerious thing. And a wiſer than he has ſaid of laughter, that *it is madneſs*; and of mirth, *what doth it* * *?*—Alas! the laughter and mirth which the wiſe man there ſpeaks of; the ſinful, frothy, noiſy mirth that generally accompanies the riot and extravagance in which the young, and I fear too many of the old men of this world, ſo freely indulge themſelves; this mirth, I ſay, inſtead of doing them ſervice, does them a world of miſchief: it effeminates their ſouls, and deludes them with falſe appearances of happineſs; it brings them, as it were, into a ſhady pleaſant vale, and there ſoothes and careſſes them for a while, till at laſt they find that it is but

* Eccl. ii. 2.

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the valley of the ſhadow of death, where a ſnake lies lurking in the graſs, and the brood of the old ſerpent ſtill haunts the bewitching tree.

Thus ſinful joy and pleaſure lead us into a fool's paradiſe, and there leave us to confeſs and lament our folly when our true paradiſe is loſt. They ſeduce us out of the manly, rugged paths of virtue and honour, into a ſmooth and ſeemingly even way; and then draw a miſt before our eyes, that we may not ſee the precipice and gulf to which they lead us: they give a looſe to our paſſions, take us off our guard, and baniſh that wiſe and ſerious habit of thinking, which, under God, is our beſt defence. *Rejoice, O young man*; but know, that whilſt thou layeſt thy boſom thus open, by intemperate and ſinful mirth, thou doſt but invite the tempter to enter in and dwell there; and ſo, inſtead of filling thy heart with true joy, thou emptieſt it of all thy virtue, and admitteſt into thy ſoul a viper that will at laſt prey upon and devour thy very heart.——But let us go on to conſider this ironical advice of the Preacher; *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth.* And, when we think ſeriouſly

ouſly of it, pray what is youth, that it ſhould occaſion ſuch rejoicing in it? 'Tis a time of weakneſs and inexperience in all; and, for the moſt part, is it not ſo ill managed, as to prove a reproach and ſorrow unto our old age?—Is this a fit matter of ſo much joy?—Is this a proper ſeaſon for us to rejoice, when we are ſowing the ſeeds of a long and bitter repentance?—Is this a time to give the reins to our fancy, and truſt our virtue without a guard, when our reaſon is ſo weak, and our paſſions ſo ſtrong, that we really do not know well what we are doing?—But youth, ſays the young man, is a time of bodily ſtrength and vigour; our ſpirits are then active, and our humour is gay; and therefore moſt perſons in that period of life look upon pleaſure as their portion, and rejoice in their lot, and ſo reſolve to go on and purſue it at any rate: which reſolution the Preacher continues ſeemingly to encourage; *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart chear thee in the days of thy youth*; i. e. improve all opportunities of joy, encourage thyſelf in pleaſure, and let not the apprehenſions of any evil come nigh unto thy ſoul. This is the

ſpring-

ſpring-time of the year, when all things are freſh and fragrant, and nature itſelf is in its prime; and therefore it is fit we alſo ſhould comply with the chearfulneſs of the ſeaſon, and enjoy the bleſſings that are before us. This is the purport of the wiſe man's irony; and, were he in earneſt, how few young men are there but would rejoice in ſuch doctrine!

Youth, like the ſpring, is indeed a time of hopes; but what is it that makes the ſpring ſo? Why, 'tis only the hopes of a joyful harveſt;—then is the proper time for joy. And juſt ſo, 'tis nothing but the proſpect of what he is to be when he comes to man's eſtate, that can authorize and juſtify a young man's pleaſure.—Youth is but a common paſſage into the world; and according as our ſtation in the world is like to prove, ſuch ſhould our paſſage be.—It may lead us into a priſon as ſoon as into a paradiſe; why then ſuch unlimited joy in the expectation, before we know the reſult? Why ſhould we make our misfortunes, when they come upon us, prove more uneaſy, by means of this diſappointment, and flatter ourſelves with the hopes

hopes of a glorious harveſt, which perhaps we never may reap?

Youth is a time of growing ſtrength and vigour: but, alas! how ſhort is that time, and how uncertain is that ſtrength!—How liable is youth to be ſupplanted by a diſeaſe, or to be ſnapt off by an untimely death! Or how certain is it to be ſwallowed up in a few years by impotent age! Yea, even whilſt we reflect upon it, we grow old; and our ſtrength decays and wears away by the very uſing of it. — Thou mayeſt rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and thy heart may chear thee in the days of thy youth; but know, that theſe days are few, and whilſt thou rejoiceſt in them, thy youth not only flies away, but the extravagance and irregularity of thy joys ſhortens thy youth, and makes thee grow old before thy time.

All this the young man, ignorant as he is, cannot but know: but prudence is a contradiction to his years, and forecaſt is the thing he hates; and he will not conſider, nor think, whether, or how, he is to live for ever. Though his underſtanding, young as it is, could inform him better, yet ſtill he perſiſts to follow

thoſe counterfeit, ironical directions in my text, to walk in the ways of his heart, whatever happens to ſoul, body, or reputation; and will not depart from following the ſight of his eyes, for all the dull, blind morals in the world: and therefore, as his fancy leads him, and his paſſions drive, ſo he runs deſperately on, and reſolves to allow himſelf the full ſcope of his preſent inclinations, without any regard to things to come.—What a terrible, what a dangerous courſe is this! Alas! age itſelf, with all its temper and experience, ſtands in need of good advice: why then ſhould a young man think his heart ſo wiſe as to truſt it without a guide?—'Tis a dangerous thing for the wiſeſt man to lean unto his own underſtanding; and very few are ſo fooliſh and ſelf-conceited as to do ſo in the affairs of common life. Upon what confidence then does this young man preſume, with reſpect to eternity, that he alone ſhould walk in the ways of his heart, and the ſight of his eyes, whilſt yet his eyes are ſhort-ſighted, and his heart deceitful? that he ſhould ſet up all his ſails, and ſteer himſelf by the direction of his own extravagant and wild imaginations,

imaginations, without conſidering how many fatal rocks and quickſands lie in his way, too deep for him to diſcover, and yet too high and too numerous for him to eſcape? And yet, tell him of his danger, and he does but deſpiſe the information: he looks no farther than the ſurface; and where the face of the ſea is ſmooth, he apprehends none of the dangers that are out of ſight.—Therefore he ſtill preſſes forward in his courſe, diſdains all rules, breaks all bounds, and deſires no better authority for what he does, than the warrant of his own deluded eyes, and the approbation of his own weak, wicked, and miſguided heart!

Thus he comes forth full of his youth, and rejoices in it, *like a giant to run his courſe*, and reſolves to purſue his pleaſures, though it be to the deſtruction both of them and of himſelf. His fooliſh, inconſiderate heart is like the ſtubble, 'tis quickly in a flame; and yet he is never well, nor eaſy, but when he is playing with the fire; and if he can but get ſome preſent ſatisfaction from the warmth, he lets it burn on, without conſidering that the fire which heats him,

him, conſumes him too; and that the ways of his heart, inſtead of prolonging his youth, or his life, lead him directly to the chambers of death.

And thus I have endeavoured to diſcuſs the firſt branch of my diſcourſe, by ſhewing the follies and dangers of youth, and how ſtrongly our youthful inclinations naturally lead us unto vanity.—But before I proceed farther, let me obſerve, that if the raſhneſs, the ignorance, and the inexperience of youth are no ſufficient excuſe for ſuch a fooliſh, irreligious courſe of life; how much more inexcuſable are they who continue the ſame practice in their riper years, and carry their youthful vices up with them into manhood, and thence to the very grave!—Yet, alas! how common is this?—Yea, how is it, I may ſay, poſſible that it ſhould be otherwiſe? For, youth is the ordinary and proper time to model our hearts into any frame: then our faculties are freſh, active, and vigorous, our will compliant, our underſtanding not prepoſſeſſed; and at theſe tender years we receive impreſſions with eaſe, and by uſe and practice retain them to great perfection. Now, this being the

caſe,

caſe, and our young men being ſo very profligate and irreligious as they generally are, being guided only by the ſight of their own eyes, and following and delighting in nothing but the ways of their own heart, how is it poſſible, I ſay, but theſe youthful vices will grow into deadly habits?—And will not thoſe paſſions, which we ſo indulge and cheriſh in our youth, grow too powerful for all the reaſon and conſideration of manhood, and ſo prove the ſhame and reproach of our old-age, maugre all its gravity and experience?—And yet, would theſe young-old people, as I may call them, but ſeriouſly think of it; — how unbecoming the reaſon and ſtate of a man are the extravagancies and wild frolics of youth? and how diſagreeable a thing is a grey head and a childiſh heart? When experience and years have ripened their reaſon, improved their underſtanding, and given them a judgment of diſcretion; at leaſt ſhould and might have done ſo; what a ſhame is it to deliver up themſelves to the guidance of their paſſions and the government of their luſts, their irregular unreaſonable inclinations; and, forgetting the gravity of their age,

to be carried away, like children, by every toyiſh ſport and trifling pleaſure? How abſurd a ſight is it, to ſee a man's ſoul and body ſo unequally yoked, that his vices ſhould not only keep up with, but outrun his ſtrength; and that with the reaſon and conſideration of manhood, and under the decays of a feeble age, he ſhould affect and purſue youthful luſts, and its vain and ſinful pleaſures?—When we have had ſo long experience of their vanity, who could think that we ſhould not yet be convinced?—When we have enjoyed ſo many opportunities of exerciſing and improving our virtue, what a reproach is it to our nature, that we have made no progreſs all this while in the only buſineſs of importance we have to do in the world?—How can we ſee our own nakedneſs and not be aſhamed?—How can we hear the voice of God and not be afraid?—'Tis he that upbraids our folly, in my text; 'tis he that denounces judgments againſt us; and though the ſentence is tranſmitted to us through the Preacher's hands, yet the voice is the voice of God, and ſo ſhall certainly be accompliſhed.—If then thou wilt *rejoice,*

O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart chear thee in the days of thy youth, and continue to *walk in the* corrupt *ways of thy heart, and in the* deluding *ſight of thine eyes; know thou,* and be aſſured, *that for all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment.*

DIS-

DISCOURSE VI.

THE FORMER SUBJECT CONTINUED.

DISCOURSE VI.

ECCLES. xi. 9.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart chear thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment.

THIS excellent book, whence my text is taken, may be called the Recantation of Solomon: a man ſo extraordinary, both in virtue and vice, that, except it was our father Adam, no man ever roſe ſo high, or had ſo great a fall.

How long he continued in his extravagancies is uncertain; but, through the grace of God, he did return to himſelf at laſt, and gave warning to all that ſhould come after him, to avoid thoſe deſperate courſes which he had run. Re-

membering what it was that ſeduced him at firſt, where it was that he loſt his way, and upon what rocks he had ſplit; namely, by walking in the ways of his heart, and in the ſight of his eyes; he ſets up a beacon, and affixes a warning, for the direction and advantage of all poſterity:—for, in this book, he recounts all the follies of his youth, and the excurſions and irregularities of his riper years; his fond purſuits after pleaſure and mirth, women and wine, and all things which vain, intemperate, and inconſiderate men are apt to ſet their hearts upon; and, after repreſenting them to the utmoſt advantage, at the foot of the account he ſums them all up in a cypher: *Vanity of vanities, ſays the Preacher*; *all*, none excepted, *is vanity*; yea, not only vanity, but *vexation of ſpirit*.—But, leſt unthinking men ſhould reckon all the vexation of ſpirit ſufficiently balanced by the pleaſure, vain as it is, of walking *in the ways of their heart, and in the ſight of their eyes*, the Preacher, in the cloſe of my text, adds a grave and peremptory intimation of a worſe conſequence of ſuch a courſe: *But know thou*, ſays he, *that for all theſe things God will*

will bring thee into judgment; which, no doubt, was one of thoſe conſiderations that had at laſt reclaimed the Preacher himſelf.

In the tenth and eleventh verſes of the twelfth chapter of this book, we read, that *the Preacher ſought to find out acceptable words; words that ſhould pierce as goads, and ſtick like nails faſtened in the aſſembly by a maſterly hand.* And certainly theſe words of my text are ſuch;—very apt and proper to ſtrike our affections, and to fix themſelves in our memory; and, if they are but believed and looked upon as a certain truth, enough to correct all the looſeneſs and irregularity of our minds, and to make us give over walking *in the ways of* our *heart, and in the ſight of* our *eyes*, and to take a better courſe.—And, in order to this great and good end, I propoſed, in diſcourſing from theſe words, to illuſtrate and lay before you theſe two particulars:

1ſt, The natural inclinations of youth, and how ſtrongly they lead us unto vanity. — This I have already ſpoken to pretty fully; and ſhall proceed to conſider the ſecond, *viz.*

The curb that is put upon us by religion; and how much more reaſonable

it is that we ſhould comply with the apprehenſions of a future judgment, than to *walk in the ways of* our own *heart, and in the ſight of* our own *eyes.*——*Know thou,* ſays the wiſe man; *i. e.* be aſſured of this great truth; for there is not the leaſt room to doubt of it, or diſbelieve it. And indeed, whatever libertines and free-thinkers may affect to ſay, the doctrine of a future judgment is agreeable enough to their underſtanding; but only diſagreeable to their will, and to that in which they have choſen and reſolved to place their intereſt.—The ways of their heart, and the ſight of their eyes cannot ſtand the trial of judgment; and therefore they would fain perſuade themſelves that there is no ſuch thing as an after-reckoning. But 'tis not in the power of the ſinner's fancy and wiſhes to alter the nature of things, or reverſe the decree of God; to diſſolve the connection between folly and repentance, and to prevent the conſequence of judgment upon ſin. *'Tis appointed for all men once to die, and after death the judgment.* How much more prudent a courſe would it therefore be, to alter thoſe practices which are within our power, and comply

comply with those divine decrees which are unalterable! To forsake the *ways of* our *heart, and the sight of* our *eyes*, which make us so averse to the thoughts of judgment; and, seeing we cannot bring down religion to the level of our irregular lives, to raise up our lives to the rules which it prescribes; *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, when he shall come to judge the living and the dead.*

We see to what a prodigious degree of folly and extravagance we might be carried by the inclinations of nature and the heat of youth, did not the expectation of that great account check those inclinations, and cool our hearts into some serious thoughts. This grave consideration is enough to confound our lusts, and baffle our enjoyments; and when we look to the sword hanging over us, we shall have but little relish for the dainties that are before us. This is the great power of God, whereby he overrules the intemperance of man, and corrects our folly, by shewing us our dan-

ger: *Rejoice, O young man,* &c. *but know thou.*—But how ſhould a young man know, when his eyes are ſo dazzled with vanities, his heart ſo prepoſſeſſed with pleaſure, and his ſpirits ſo full of joy, that he has left no room for ſuch melancholy conſiderations? And as for thoſe judgments of God, they are ſo far out of his ſight, that he is, he ſays, at a loſs whether there be ſuch a thing or not. The Preacher indeed tells him ſo; but for this he hath only the Preacher's word.—Nay, but 'tis the word of God tells him ſo; and he himſelf at laſt will find it ſo; and then he will wiſh that he had believed the Preacher ſooner.—Then what comfort will he receive from all the rejoicings of his youth? What will it then profit him to have walked *in the ways of* his *heart, and in the ſight of* his *eyes*, when that indecent liberty, which he ſo unreaſonably uſed, ſhall end in an odious confinement, and he ſhall reap in tears what he ſowed in joy?—Then all the former delicacies of his life will ſerve only to make his death the more intolerable; and the ſhort-lived pleaſures of his youth will but increaſe the ſenſe of his never-dying pains.—How

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diſmal will be the remembrance of his ſin, when he ſhall conſider, that it was only the walking after thoſe ways of his heart that has brought him into this place of torment; only truſting to the ſight of his eyes that has loſt him thoſe pleaſures for evermore, which eye hath not ſeen, nor the heart of man conceived? And can he think that all the entertainments of his youth were worth this?—If he was put to his choice again, would he, upon ſecond thoughts, ſubmit to the exchange, and once more give up his ſoul for nought? Why then does he not take warning, before it is too late, now, whilſt his ſoul is in his own keeping? Why does he not ſecure his happineſs before that dreadful day comes, when his negligence may be repented of, but can never be retrieved?—Since he knows that there remains a fatal account, why does he not take care to come prepared?—Since he knows, *that for all theſe things God will bring* him *into judgment*, why does he not ſtudy to pacify his Judge, and fit himſelf for mercy?—When the irreverſible decree is once paſſed upon him, then what would he not give to reverſe the ſentence?

What luſts of the fleſh, what pleaſures of the body, or what ſin of the ſoul would he not forego and give up, to redeem himſelf? And how will he wiſh that the ways of his heart had been corrected long ago, though it had been by loſing the ſight of his eyes, and pulling out thoſe deceitful glaſſes that betrayed him?

'Tis a melancholy thing to reflect on thoſe pleaſures that ſhall be no more, and for a man to think that he hath been happy; but it will be much more miſerable and tormenting, to think that he might have been ſo for ever.—He knew the terrors of the Lord, and would not be perſuaded; he was often admoniſhed of his danger, but would not be convinced; and now ſhall he be forced to acknowledge, and ſay, I am juſtly puniſhed for my unbelief! now am I perſuaded with a vengeance!

Indeed, it is ſuch reflections as theſe that aggravate the puniſhment of the unbelieving, impenitent, and obſtinate ſinner, and increaſe the torments of hell itſelf. This is a worm in his conſcience that never dies; this is ſuch a heart-burning within him as never goes out: 'tis

'tis a folly for which he can never excuſe himſelf; and the remembrance of thoſe ways, which were the vain and vicious entertainments of his youth, will prove his torment to all eternity.

All theſe are moving and diſmal conſiderations.—An wounded ſpirit is the moſt exquiſite pain; and the wrath of God in judgment is what no mortal man can bear: 'tis ſuch a burthen as the young man, with all his ſpirit, cannot caſt off; and the old, inveterate, hardy ſinner is not proof againſt it. But ſtill, how ſhall the young man know, and be convinced, that this is true? We have, indeed, the word of God to vouch it; but it is that God whoſe power the ſinner has defied; and then what hearing or credence will he give unto his word? But we have not only the word of God for this great truth (and ſure even that alone might well ſatisfy us) but we have the voice of nature too to ſecond theſe truths of our religion; we have the univerſal cry and conſent of all mankind.—We may aſk ſuch as pretend to diſbelieve another life, what is the meaning of thoſe preſages of their own hearts; that active moving principle within them,

which gives them a boundleſs deſire to live, and ſhews them ſome confuſed proſpect of a vaſt time to come? What is this but ſome glances of their immortality, ſome dawnings of an eternal day? And do they not know, that *God will* then *bring them into judgment?*—From whence then proceed thoſe ſtartling apprehenſions and remorſes in their ſouls, which all their obſtinacy cannot ſtifle, and all their intemperance cannot remove? This certainly is the voice of God within them; the forebodings of hell, and the prelude to a future judgment.

Let the young man then fortify himſelf in ſin, and intrench his ſoul within his pleaſures; though he think them ſecret as the darkneſs, and quiet as the grave, yet the eye of God will break in upon him. Both His eye and His hand can reach us when we are moſt retired; and though fig-leaves may hide our ſhame from the ſight of men, yet all the trees in Eden cannot ſhelter us from the preſence of God.—Even our own obſtinacy and ſin, ſtupid as it is, can give us neither diverſion nor relief; but, though we have hardened our hearts like the

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nether mill-ſtone, yet God makes them ſoft again, and prepares them for the impreſſions of his wrath; puts fears and terrors into our ſoul, and then gives the deadly blow.

All this the ſinner knows, though he will not confeſs. It is not death alone, but ſomething after death, of which he ſtands in awe: it is not the fear of being reduced to nothing, that diſturbs his pleaſures; he would willingly compound with God for ſuch a ſtate as that, and would gladly give up his ſoul for loſt, ſo his body might not be tormented in this flame: he does all he can to perſuade himſelf that he dropt into this world by chance, and ſhall ſink out of it into nothing: nay, ſuch a death as this is the utmoſt of his ambition; 'tis what he has uſed himſelf to all his life; a ſtupid unprofitable ſtate, wherein his ſoul and reaſon have been buried all this while, and has only ſome perverſe motions, ſome ſenſeleſs works, to prove that he is alive.—But, *for all theſe things, God will bring* him *into judgment*; and God knows to what a fatal ſum all theſe things may amount, or what may be the fatal conſequence! When all our evil deeds ſhall be

be expoſed in the ſight of that God, whoſe eyes are too quick to overſee, and too pure to behold iniquity, the leaſt we can expect is, that he ſhould remove us and our ſins together, that loathſome object, from his preſence; a puniſhment greater than we can bear!

And now, the ſinner may walk on *in the ways of* his *heart*; and, if it ſeems good in his eyes, he may trample upon virtue and religion too; he may run down all reaſon that oppoſes his luſts, and look upon this world as made for his diverſion, and the other for his ſcorn and deriſion: yet ſtill there is a ſecret reſentment in his mind, that will revenge the quarrel of religion; a ſad miſgiving in his heart, which tells him there is a dreadful account to come, and whiſpers in his ears, *that for all theſe things God will bring* him *into judgment.*

Conſider this, O young man, and then rejoice if thou dareſt, *and let thy heart chear thee*, if it can: For to what purpoſe ſhouldeſt thou truſt to *the ſight of thine eyes*, when thou knoweſt not how ſhortly thou ſhalt be deprived of them, and when thou knoweſt that God will bring thee to a ſtricter and ſeverer judgment? Why

Why ſhouldeſt thou follow *the ways of thine* own *heart*, when ſhortly thy very heart and thy ſtrength ſhall fail thee; and when this very heart of thine, which flatters and betrays thee now, at laſt will accuſe thee, condemn thee, and torment thee?

Since, therefore, the judgment which we apprehend is ſo very dreadful, and our ſins give us ſo much reaſon to be apprehenſive of it; what remains, but that we make timely proviſion for our ſecurity, and immediately begin a wiſer courſe of life, than to *walk in the ways of our hearts, and in the ſight of our eyes.* Let us no longer dally with our deſtruction; let us no longer trifle with God's judgments, nor live in ſuch diſmal ſuſpence; but let us offer up unto God our darling vices now, whilſt we have ſome *pleaſure in them*, and preſent him with that *ſin of our ſoul*, whatever it is, that lies neareſt to our heart, that the coſtlineſs of the preſent may be an undeniable argument of our regard and love for him, and an effectual recommendation of us to his favour and mercy.—So early, ſo lively a ſacrifice, will be ſure to be accepted.—But if we firſt allow the

the decays of age to come upon us, and our pleaſure to abandon us; when we muſt be virtuous by force, and no thanks to us for it neither; then, alas! how earneſtly ſhall we wiſh that we had given up our youthful joys in time, when we might have had heaven for them in exchange.—Therefore, let us look farther than the dim eyes of fleſh can carry our views.—Let us, with the light of faith, penetrate into the inviſible and eternal world; and, as the Apoſtle ſays of himſelf *, let us *walk by faith*, and *not by ſight*.—Let us think ſeriouſly on what the Chriſtian religion teaches us concerning ourſelves: that our bodies muſt be buried, and this whole world burned; but yet it triumphs over death by a general reſurrection, and opens all into an eternal ſtate.—It has placed us above our bodies, above the world, and above death, and tells us that we ſhall be preſent at the diſſolution of all things; that we ſhall ſee the earth in flames, and the heavens wrapt up like a ſcroll; that we muſt ſtand up at the general reſurrection, and appear at the univerſal judgment, and live and fare for ever, accord-

* 2 Cor. v. 7.

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ing to our behaviour here, when all that our hearts have deſired, and our eyes have ſeen in this world, is paſſed away and gone, like a tale or a dream.

Let us then be perſuaded in time, to check the intemperance of our luſts; let us mortify the ſinful deſires of our hearts, and correct the vanity and wandering of our eyes, before they have run us upon a rock, from which we can never diſengage ourſelves.—Let us reſtrain and abate our immoderate deſires of airy pleaſure, and endeavour to poiſe and refreſh our ſouls with more ſolid, ſerious reflections.—Let us conſider, that one part of us is the offspring of Heaven, and of divine extraction; and therefore, that it is far below us to be wholly taken up with pampering or amuſing the fleſh.—Let us remember, that God ſent us into this world to govern and ſubdue it, and accordingly has endued our ſouls with reaſon, and a graceful majeſty and gravity, that ſo we might bring all his creatures under our command.—Why then ſhould we ſuffer them ſo perpetually to make ſlaves of us?—Why ſhould we tamely ſee ourſelves led captive by that world which

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is below us; be drawn to and fro with cords of vanity, and made the ſport of every temptation? — Let others, then, rove about for ſuch fantaſtical, ſinful delights, who have no ſolid joys to dwell upon; but let us make it our chief buſineſs to correct the vanity and extravagance of our nature, and make his law to be our only rule, at whoſe judgment-ſeat we muſt appear, and by whoſe ſentence we muſt ſtand or fall.

Let us live *in the ſight of* His *eyes, and walk in the ways of* His *heart*, ſo may we ſincerely *rejoice in* our *youth, and* our *heart may chear* us in our riper years; and when old-age ſhall come upon us, we may even long for that time, when our bleſſed Lord ſhall bring us, and all his faithful ſervants, to a judgment, not only terrible, but comfortable.

God give us all grace ſo to live, that we may have the joyful hope of this at the hour of death, and find mercy of him in the day of judgment.

DIS-

DISCOURSE VII.

OUR AFFECTIONS OUGHT TO BE FIXED ON GOD ONLY.

PROVERBS xxiii. 26.

My ſon, give me thine heart.

IN many places of this book of Proverbs, Wiſdom and Religion are ſynonimous terms, or words that ſignify the ſame thing: as their oppoſite, Wickedneſs, is as often branded with the ignominious name of Folly, and the ſinner with that of Fool.—Nay, Wiſdom, in ſeveral paſſages of both the canonical and apocryphal writings, is uſed to ſignify God himſelf, eſpecially the ſecond perſon of the ever-bleſſed and glorious Trinity, the *Logos* or Word of God; as particularly, Prov. iii. 19. *The Lord by wiſdom hath founded the earth.* Or, as Wiſdom ſpeaks in the eighth chapter, 27th and 28th verſes: *When he prepared the heavens,*

heavens, I was there; when he ſet a compaſs upon the face of the deep; when he eſtabliſhed the clouds above; when he ſtrengthened the fountains of the deep; when he gave the ſea his decree, that the waters ſhould not paſs his commandment; when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then was I by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him. All which is plainly applied by St. John to the *Logos*, or eternal Son of God: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The ſame was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made**.—Now, whether we ſuppoſe that it is God himſelf, or Religion, that Solomon introduces as ſpeaking in my text, it makes no eſſential difference; for religion is nothing elſe but the duty we owe to God, and the way to the enjoyment of him; and therefore, the ſetting our hearts ſeriouſly and ſincerely to the work of religion, is the ſame thing in effect as giving our heart to God.

Man is ſo formed by the wiſe Creator of all things, that he naturally and ne-

* St. John i. 1, 2, 3.

ceſſarily

ceſſarily places his heart upon ſomething or other, in order to attain a ſupport of that weakneſs, and a ſupply of thoſe wants, which he finds in himſelf. And hence it is that the ſons of men are engaged in ſuch various, and many times oppoſite purſuits; becauſe ſome ſet their hearts upon one object, others upon another, as the only thing that can ſupply all their wants, or, in other words, make them perfectly happy.—It is true, there are ſome things which we know will ſupply our wants only in part; and therefore, on theſe we beſtow only a proportionable ſhare of our affections: but whatever thing we apprehend to be that on which our happineſs depends moſt, and the want of which will make us moſt miſerable, on this we place our hearts moſt; this we deſire above every thing elſe; and for the ſake of obtaining this, we will chearfully forego every leſſer pleaſure or enjoyment. This was what the philoſophers called man's *ſummum bonum*, or his chief good; and what our Saviour, in the goſpel, calls a man's treaſure: *Where your treaſure is* (ſays he) *there will your hearts be alſo.* — Now there are two things in general which offer

offer themſelves to mankind, as candidates and rivals for their hearts or affections; *viz.* God, and the world; or, the things of this preſent life, and of the future: and reaſon, revelation, and experience, all concur in teaching us, that we cannot give our hearts to both.—A man indeed muſt have two hearts, and two ſouls, before he can give an heart to God and an heart to the world too; for no man can have more than one chief good.—And hence it is that the Apoſtle ſo poſitively pronounces, that if we *love the world, the love of the Father is not*, cannot be *in us.* — Too many, I know, have thought to join both; but it is becauſe they underſtand neither; for theſe are rivals whom 'tis impoſſible to reconcile; maſters whoſe intereſts and commands are ſo oppoſite and contradictory, that we cannot ſerve both of them: and therefore, thoſe men are moſt wretchedly deceived, who think to divide their hearts between them; to compaſs heaven, as it were, with the one hand, and earth with the other: for the wiſdom of God has decreed it otherwiſe; and the acquiſition of the world, as it is all that is allowed, ſo is it enough to take

take up the whole man; to employ his heart; *i. e.* all the powers and faculties of his ſoul, and ſo leave nothing of him to be employed in acquiring the other.—Behold then, and wonder at the aſtoniſhing goodneſs and condeſcenſion of the great and good God, who gave us our being, all that we are, and all that we have; and conſequently can need nothing, or be profited by nothing that we have to give him! And yet, how does he vouchſafe to ſolicit, and even court our affections! *My ſon, give me thy heart.*—Yea, on this he ſets ſo great a value, that our love is all the price he has been pleaſed to ſet upon glory, honour, and immortality, and the eternal enjoyment of himſelf; ſo that there is nothing ſo great and glorious which a creature is capable of, but God is ready to give it a man in exchange for his heart.

It is therefore highly, nay abſolutely neceſſary, that we ſhould often look into the ſtate of our own hearts, and conſider, with ſtrict impartiality and attention, upon what it is that we have placed our affections: whether we have complied with the gracious invitation and

call which our heavenly Father here gives us in my text; or whether we have ſet our hearts upon ſome one or other of the alluring vanities of this world. Few men, indeed, but will profeſs that God is the great object of their love: nay, I am afraid, there are too many who deceive themſelves with a vain imagination that it is ſo; for nothing is ſo deceitful as our own hearts, and in nothing are they more apt to deceive us than in this very point. — In order then to prevent us from thus impoſing upon ourſelves, I ſhall endeavour to point out ſome marks and tokens, whereby we may be able to judge whether we have really given our hearts to God, or to the world. After which, I ſhall endeavour to perſuade you, by ſome ſuitable motives and arguments, to yield your hearts unto God.

1ſt, then, If God is really poſſeſſed of our hearts and affections, 'tis certain he will be always uppermoſt, and moſt frequently in our thoughts; ſo that whatever elſe we may be employed about, and although our lawful worldly buſineſs, and the neceſſary cares and occupations of this life, may engroſs the greateſt part of

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our time, yet it is not in the power of theſe things to drive the great object of our love out of our minds; but, in the midſt of all our worldly cares and labours, our hearts will riſe above them, and carry our minds naturally to that object which we eſteem and love as our chief good.—You cannot but be ſenſible that this is the caſe with reſpect to worldly things. Whatever thing or perſon we have once fixed our love upon, our thoughts are always running after; for ſtrong love is ſuch a biaſs upon the mind, that 'tis as impoſſible for a man to live and not to breathe, as not to think often, nay, almoſt continually, upon the chief object of his affections. And therefore, if we have ſincerely given our hearts to God, we ſhall not think it enough to beſtow ſome tranſient ſcattered thoughts upon him now and then, and when we have nothing elſe to do, or are not allowed to do any thing elſe: This, 'tis to be feared, is the caſe with too many: But the man who truly loves God, raiſes himſelf into the Divine preſence as oft as he can, by devout contemplation; and, though he cannot perhaps perſonally re-

tire often from the world, but muſt toil and drudge for the neceſſaries of life, and in fulfilling the duties of that ſtation in this world, wherein Providence has ſeen fit to place him; yet ſtill his heart is in heaven, and his converſation too. He often fixes his thoughts upon that glorious throne where the Lamb of God ſitteth for ever and ever:—he often conſiders how happy they muſt be who ſhall be admitted to behold the Author of all perfection;—yea, who ſhall partake of his glories, who is the Fountain of all glory and happineſs:—he thinks, with unſpeakable pleaſure, of that infinitely merciful and good Being, who can make us happy by infinite ways; who can ſupply all our defects, ſatisfy all our deſires, and in whoſe bleſſed and glorious preſence nothing can be wanting.—Theſe, and ſuch thoughts as theſe, are the chief entertainment of his mind; the ſubjects he takes moſt delight to ſurvey and meditate upon.—Whereas, to a man whoſe heart is devoted to the world, all theſe thoughts are quite unpalatable, and even nauſeous; he has no reliſh for them, or delight in them. As the Pſalmiſt expreſſes it, *God is not in all his thoughts:*

or, if at any time by chance he enters there, the man is uneaſy, and, as it were, out of his element; and the proſpect of any lucrative purchaſe, or any ſenſual enjoyment upon earth, is what he takes more delight to think of, than all the eternal joys and glories of heaven.

2. Another mark by which we may know whether we have ſurrendered our hearts to God, is, our readineſs to part with any thing that comes in competition with his love and ſervice. In vain do we pretend to love God, while we prefer any thing to his friendſhip and favour, or chuſe to ſin, rather than to ſuffer, when his providence is pleaſed to call us to a ſtate of ſuffering.—It is true, a man may not always have an opportunity of having his love put to any ſevere trial of this kind.—In times of peace and proſperity, his religion and his worldly intereſt may go hand in hand together.—But even then, the man who truly loves God, will endeavour to be always in a readineſs or preparation of mind, to part with all his worldly enjoyments, if need be, rather than offend his God, or wound the peace of his own conſcience.—Not but it is poſſible a man

may deceive himſelf as to this point, until he is brought to an actual trial.—An over-confident perſon may, like St. Peter, imagine that he would die for his God, rather than deny or offend him; whilſt, on the other hand, a ſincere, but humble and timorous Chriſtian, may be very apt to fear, that, ſhould God put him to any ſuch ſevere trial of his love, his faith and his courage would fail him. But the beſt way to judge of ourſelves as to this point, is to conſider our behaviour at preſent, and whether we have already, for God's ſake, chearfully and heartily given up thoſe things, which either his word has commanded us to part with, or his providence has ſeen fit to take from us.

For example — God has commanded us to put away from us all our corrupt and vile luſts; to ſubdue and mortify all our ſenſual and diſorderly affections. But he who will not do this upon God's command, we may depend upon it, will never part with his life for God's ſake. He that cannot endure the little ſeverities of mortification, will hardly endure the pains of martyrdom.

Again,—We are ſtrictly commanded by

by God to beſtow a proportionable ſhare of the temporal good things which he hath given us, upon the needy and neceſſitous.—But he who will not be perſuaded to do this; he who cannot find in his heart, notwithſtanding all our Lord's ſtrong commands, and moſt bountiful promiſes, to expend any conſiderable part of his worldly goods in pious and charitable uſes; you may be certain, if Chriſt ſhould call him to forſake all, and follow him, he would turn his back upon his call; and though perhaps, like the rich young man in the goſpel, he might go away ſorrowful, as being loth to leave his hopes of heaven, yet away he would go, leaving Chriſt, and cleaving to this world.

Once more. God, in his infinitely wiſe and good providence, often ſees fit to deprive us, though not of all, yet perhaps of ſome of our greateſt worldly props and comforts.—The wife of our boſom, the child of our affections, or the friend whom we love as our own ſoul, is taken from us;—or our enemies are permitted, in ſome great degree, to prevail againſt us, and to deprive us of ſome conſiderable part of our ſubſtance,

by force or fraud, by oppreſſion or injuſtice, in ſome ſhape or other; or ſtorms and tempeſts, or ſome one or other of thoſe events which we commonly, though very improperly, term accidents, have overtaken us, and reduced us to poverty, or at leaſt brought us much nearer to it than we were before.—Now, he who cannot ſubmit to any thing of this kind, with that humility, patience, calmneſs, and reſignation which God requires, but either becomes quite ſunk and diſpirited under his affliction, or breaks out into violence, impatience, and murmuring againſt Providence; this man, we may be certain, would never voluntarily part with life and all, for the ſake of God and a good conſcience.—In fine, no covetous, voluptuous, or ambitious man, while he remains ſuch, will ever love or reliſh the doctrine of the croſs, or take it up, if he can ſhun it.

But, on the other hand, the truly mortified Chriſtian, whoſe heart is dead to this world, and ſpiritually riſen with Chriſt; who lives the life of God, and endeavours to ſerve him, and do his duty faithfully in time of peace; let not ſuch an one be over-ſolicitous what he would

would do in time of persecution? let him only resolve to do what he ought, and humbly depend upon the grace and goodness of God to support and enable him.—Let him comfort himself with the sure promise of God to all good Christians, which is made by St. Paul*; *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able to bear; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*—Another strong mark of our having given our hearts to God, is, our having earnest longings and desires for that blessed place, where the most perfect enjoyment of him is to be found.—The man whose body is burnt up with a raging fever, may as well not desire a drop of water to cool his tongue, as the soul will fail of desiring to be in heaven, where it looks for the enjoyment of the supreme object of its love.—Every man who knows and considers what it is to be completely and eternally happy, must desire it; and whoever has a well-grounded hope of it, cannot but long

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

for it. The Supreme Being is ſo lovely in himſelf, and his attractions ſo ſtrong, that due and frequent contemplations on them cannot but excite the moſt earneſt deſires of being as cloſely and intimately united to them as 'tis poſſible for a creature to be. The ſoul will pant for God, *as the hart panteth after the water-brooks*: It will (as the Pſalmiſt expreſſeth it) *be athirſt for God*, even *for the living God, and long to appear before his preſence*. It will find nothing in heaven but him, nor any thing on earth deſirable in compariſon of him; and will therefore, with St. Paul, have a deſire *to depart* from this vain world, *and to be with Chriſt, which is better*.—If we do not find in ourſelves theſe longings and deſires after our heavenly bliſs, 'tis certainly owing to ſome defect in our love of God, and that the joys and glories of heaven have not yet made a ſufficient impreſſion upon our hearts; for, had we the taſte and reliſh for them that they deſerve, had they once captivated our affections, they would not fail to raiſe in us a proportionable contempt of all inferior enjoyments: they would make us ready to cry out, in the words of the Pſalmiſt,

O that

O that I had wings like a dove; for then would I flee away, and be at rest.

But, 4thly, The last and surest mark of all, of our love to God, is, our sincere and universal obedience to his laws; our endeavouring, without reserve or exception, to keep all his commandments. — And this I shall endeavour to prove and illustrate unto you fully, on another occasion. In the mean time, and indeed frequently throughout the whole course of our lives, let us lift up our hearts to God, and make our addresses to him, in those excellent words of the church, "* O God, who hast prepared for them "that love thee such good things as pass "man's understanding; pour into our "hearts such love towards thee, that "we, loving thee above all things, may "obtain thy promises, which exceed "all that we can desire, through Jesus "Christ our Lord."

* Collect for the 6th Sunday after Trinity.

DISCOURSE VIII

ON THE

FORMER SUBJECT

CONTINUED.

DISCOURSE VIII.

THE FORMER SUBJECT CONTINUED.

PROVERBS xxiii. 26.

My ſon, give me thy heart.

ALL religions, and each different ſect of every religion, are agreed in making the love of God to be, as our Saviour calls it, *the firſt and great commandment:* and all men, who pretend to any religion at all, will profeſs that they love God; that he is the ſovereign maſter of their hearts and affections. Yet nothing is more certain, than that too many deceive themſelves as to this point; and that, however much the love of God may be in their mouths, his great rival, this world, has the real poſſeſſion of their hearts.

In order then to guard us againſt de-

ceiving ourſelves in this manner, I propoſed to lay down certain marks, or tokens, whereby we may be able to judge whether we have ſincerely given our hearts to God, as our chief good, or have ſet them upon ſome other object. And of theſe I mentioned the three following:

1ſt, That if God be really poſſeſſed of our hearts and affections, he will be always uppermoſt, or moſt frequently, in our thoughts. So that though the neceſſities of this life, or the ſtation wherein God hath placed us in the world, may employ us outwardly; yet ſtill in our hearts and minds we ſhall be often ſoaring above all theſe ſublunary things, and darting our thoughts to that happy place where our chief treaſure is to be found.

2dly, That another mark of our having yielded and given up our hearts to God, is, our readineſs to part with any thing that comes in competition with his love and ſervice.—When God calls us to a ſtate of ſuffering, if we chuſe to make free with our conſcience and our duty, and to ſin rather than to ſuffer; or if, when any temporal loſs or affliction

tion comes upon us, we do not bear it with that reſignation and patience, that calmneſs and ready acquieſcence in the Divine will, which God requires; this is a ſtrong ſymptom that there is ſome other object, which holds a higher place than God in our hearts and affections. And, even when we are not in a ſtate of actual ſuffering, yet, if we truly love God, we ſhall always endeavour to be in a readineſs and preparation of mind for it, ſhould it happen to be our lot.— And I pointed out, likewiſe, the beſt rules whereby to judge whether our love to God would ſtand a trial of this kind, in caſe we were put to it.

3dly, Another mark of our love to God, is, our having earneſt deſires and longings for that bleſſed place, where the moſt perfect enjoyment of him is to be found. The heart that is duly impregnated with divine love, will look with contempt upon all other enjoyments, and often and earneſtly deſire to be diſmiſſed from this vain, troubleſome world, and *to be with Chriſt, which is better.*

All theſe topics I ſpoke to in my former diſcourſe; and concluded with mentioning

tioning one other mark of our love to God, which I am now to inſiſt upon, and that is, ſincere and univerſal obedience to his commandments.—This is the ſureſt mark of any; and accordingly is, as it were, the only teſt of our love that God himſelf in the ſcripture conſtantly requires.—Thus, when he ſays, in my text, *My ſon, give me thy heart*, it immediately follows, as a proof of our having done ſo, *and let thine eyes obſerve my ways*.—So likewiſe, in Moſes's laſt exhortation to the Iſraelites *, he tells them, *And now, Iſrael, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, and to love him; and to walk in all his ways; and to ſerve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul; to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his ſtatutes, which I command thee this day, for thy good?*—And our Saviour himſelf inculcates the ſame thing, ſtill more diſtinctly and ſtrongly; and that, no doubt, becauſe he foreſaw, that though this be the beſt and cleareſt evidence of their love to God, yet it is the one that many men would chiefly wiſh to

* Deut. x. 12.

be

be diſpenſed with. *If ye love me* (ſays he) *keep my commandments: He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me* *. Agreeably to which, his beloved diſciple (who, as he leaned more nearly upon his maſter's breaſt, ſeems, in this point, to have been more particularly inſpired with his Lord's ſentiments) tells us, in his Firſt Epiſtle, *Whoſo keepeth his word, in* him *verily is the love of God perfected. Hereby know we that we are in him: For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.* And again, in his 2d Epiſtle, ver. 6. *This*, ſaith he, *is love, that we walk after his commandments.*—And indeed, what is rational love? or what is the principal effect that it produceth? Is it not a deſire to pleaſe the perſon beloved, and a complacency and ſatisfaction in pleaſing him?—Now, the only way whereby we can pleaſe God, is by ſincerely endeavouring to obey his holy laws, and to become as like him as we can, in thoſe virtues and moral perfections which he hath propoſed for our imitation. And therefore, till we find this

* St. John xiv. 15, 21.

proof

proof of our love to God, let us not reſt ſatisfied with any other.—We may, perhaps, think and ſpeak of God in high raptures of admiration and praiſe; and, if we are naturally of a warm imagination and ſtrong paſſions, we may fancy that theſe rapturous thoughts and expreſſions are ſufficient evidences of our love, and that while we employ ourſelves in ſuch delightful contemplations as that of admiring the Divine perfections and excellencies, we need not be ſollicitous, or very ſcrupulous, as to the exactneſs of our obedience to the Divine laws.—But this is a moſt unwarrantable and fatal deluſion;—for, as they who tranſgreſs, or neglect to obey the Divine laws, are ſtiled the enemies of God, and are ſaid to hate him, and to be at variance or enmity with him; ſo 'tis only thoſe who pay a chearful and univerſal obedience to his commands, that he will look upon as having truly loved him.—*Ye are my friends*, ſays our Saviour, *if ye do whatſoever I command you* * :—and his words are ſtill more emphatical; *Whoſoever ſhall do the will of my Father who*

* St. John xv. 14.

is in heaven, the ſame is my brother, and ſiſter, and mother *. Plainly telling us, that he will acknowledge no relation, but what ariſes from religion only, nor regard any declaration or profeſſion of love towards him, which is not accompanied with obedience to his commands. And this, by the way, may be matter of great comfort to many ſincere and pious Chriſtians, who really love, and fear, and ſerve God, and make it appear that they do ſo, by a regular, virtuous, and religious life; but yet, becauſe they do not feel in themſelves that ſenſible warmth of affection, or thoſe ſublime tranſports which ſome pretend to, or perhaps really have, they are apt to be afraid, and ſuſpect that they do not love God ſincerely, and as they ought. But let not ſuch perſons be diſcouraged; for though I cannot, as ſome do, deſpiſe all pious heats and tranſports, and impute them wholly to enthuſiaſm; yet certain it is, we muſt not truſt too much to them, as if they were the only infallible marks of true love to God.—They may often proceed from mere mechanical cauſes, as I may ſay; from the tempe-

* St. Matt. xii. 50.

rature

rature of our body, and the warmth of our paſſions and imagination; and where they are not accompanied with a holy and virtuous life, they are of no value, nor in the leaſt to be depended upon. But when a man is conſcious to himſelf, that it is his chief ſtudy and care to pleaſe and imitate God; to obey all his commands, and become as like him as poſſible, in truth, righteouſneſs, and goodneſs; he needs no other;—he can have no ſurer evidence, that his heart is ſincere and right towards God;—for, as the tree is known by its fruits, even ſo is the love of God beſt and moſt ſurely known by a ſincere, univerſal, conſtant, and chearful obedience to his commandments. —— And thus I have diſpatched the firſt general head of my diſcourſe; and pointed out ſeveral marks and tokens by which (and eſpecially by the laſt of them) we may be able to judge, whether or not we have really given God the poſſeſſion of our hearts. Allow me now to mention ſome motives and conſiderations to perſwade us thus to give our hearts to God; *i. e.* to look upon him as our ſupreme good, and

make

make him the great object of our affections.

1ſt. Let me obſerve, that this is the only way to enable us to bear the afflictions and difficulties, we muſt unavoidably meet with in this life, with fortitude, equanimity, and conſtancy. *Man is born to trouble, as the ſparks fly upward:* and this is the peculiar advantage of the Chriſtian diſpenſation, that it alone can furniſh men with a juſt and reaſonable ſupport, under all poſſible calamities and ſufferings.—The infidel, when dangers and calamities ſurround him, has nothing to do, but deſperately and wretchedly give himſelf up for loſt; and either meanly ſink under them, or madly endeavour to end them (as too many do) by ruſhing on his own deſtruction.—But the good Chriſtian, who loves God, and has a well-grounded hope of the eternal enjoyment of him in heaven, has a moſt noble foundation for courage and conſtancy; has reaſon not only to endure, but even to deſpiſe the greateſt calamities he can meet with in this world.—Let the ambitious man loſe his friends, his

his health, or his eſtate; yet, if the darling of his thoughts, his honour, and his fame, continue entire, his ſpirit will ſtill keep up.—Let a voluptuous man be ſtripped of his credit and good name, yet his pleaſures and ſenſuality, while they remain, will relieve and comfort him;—or, let a covetous miſer have both pleaſure and honour taken from him; yet, ſo long as his bags are full, and the golden heaps gliſter in his eyes, other loſſes will affect him but little.—And juſt ſo it is with the man whoſe treaſure is in heaven; whoſe heart and affections are ſincerely devoted to his God.—Secure of his favour, he looks with a kind of holy indifference and contempt upon every thing elſe that can be taken from him.—He ſees the captain of his ſalvation made perfect through ſufferings, and leading him the way to eternal glory, through poverty, perſecutions, and death:—Why then ſhould he grudge to ſuffer with, and like his Redeemer; when he knows he ſhall be infallibly glorified with him? To be ſure, it is only our ſetting too great a value upon any of our temporal comforts or bleſſings, that makes us

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ſo extremely unhappy when we are obliged to part with them. We take up the complaint of Micah *, and are ready to cry out, *Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I more?* for whatever a man ſets his heart moſt upon, that he makes his god, and adores, whether he be ſenſible of it or not; and therefore, when he is deprived of this, as ſome time or other every man muſt be of all that this world affords, no wonder if he becomes ſpiritleſs and wretched, abject and forlorn.

But the man whoſe heart and affections are in heaven, is ſubject to no ſuch diſtreſs or diſappointment. He does not account any thing here his chief good; and therefore, though he may ſeem troubled on every ſide, yet he is not diſtreſſed; though perplexed, he is not in deſpair; though perſecuted, he is not forſaken; though caſt down, yet he is not deſtroyed; yea, though to appearance in a ſorrowful ſtate and condition, yet is he always rejoicing.—Such is the account St. Paul makes of himſelf and the other apoſtles, in the midſt of all their perſecutions and ſufferings; and

* Judg. xviii. 24.

the ſame is proportionably true of every ſincere and pious Chriſtian: however hard his lot may ſeem to be, and however great his outward ſufferings, he has a fund of joy within him, that the whole world is not able to take from him. His piety may not indeed be able to ſecure his temporal eſtate; but it can make his calling and election ſure; it can ſecure to him the love, and favour, and eternal enjoyment of his God, which are infinitely and unſpeakably more valuable than all the eſtates, pleaſures, and greatneſs of the world.

And this leads me to obſerve, in the ſecond place, That by thus ſetting our hearts upon God, and upon the glorious and bleſſed ſtate he hath provided for us, we ſhall not only fortify ourſelves againſt all misfortunes, but even find more preſent joy and delight, than the world and all that is in it can give us. —All earthly enjoyments whatſoever are mixed and imperfect: they are too worthleſs and mean in their very nature to ſatisfy the heart of man; that heart which God made for his own peculiar uſe, and on purpoſe that he might dwell in it himſelf.—So that let the man of this

this world, from among all his enjoyments, ſingle out that one which he thinks the beſt, the fulleſt, and moſt refined of all, and offer it to his reaſon and affections; and after he has poſſeſſed it to the utmoſt, then let him ſay, if he can, With this I am ſatisfied; here I have all that I can deſire and wiſh for.—No, they may be ſurfeited, but they cannot be ſatisfied! And therefore we ſee them always running about in queſt of ſome new object, to ſupply the defects of their former enjoyments. And beſides all this, the poſſeſſion of all our worldly comforts is ſo very uncertain, that this alone is enough to ſtrike a damp upon our hearts, even when in the fulleſt fruition of them.—On the other hand, the pleaſures of the mind are more rational and pure; and when theſe pleaſures ariſe from the proſpects that religion gives us, they are ever more and more entertaining and reviving.—They grow in ſtrength as we grow in age; and are never unſeaſonable or diſtaſteful. For they fill the mind with a chearfulneſs and ſerenity, which attends it at all times, and upon all occaſions. Hence the apoſtle exhorts us ſo earneſtly,

"*Rejoice in the Lord always, and again* "*I ſay rejoice.*"—As if he had ſaid; Be conſtant in reflecting on your redemption in Chriſt, and the inheritance which he has purchaſed for you; and you will find ſuch a fund of joy and comfort, as cannot be exhauſted. And indeed, what words can expreſs that inward delight and conſolation, which muſt flow in upon the mind of a good man, when he looks up to his God, and thinks upon the joys and glories of Heaven? How low and contemptible muſt all earthly things appear to the heart that is thus exalted? and how great muſt be the comfort of expecting from heaven the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, *who ſhall change this vile body, that it may be faſhioned like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to ſubdue all things unto himſelf?*—— Let us then be perſuaded to raiſe our thoughts frequently from things temporal to things eternal, and to have our converſation in heaven, whilſt we ſojourn here on earth, that we may hereafter be admitted to the everlaſting enjoyment and poſſeſſion of it.—Inſtead of amuſing ourſelves with vain airy

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ſchemes of ſucceſs and pleaſure here, let us fix our thoughts on that ſolid and ſubſtantial happineſs hereafter, which nothing but our own perſeverance in ſin can deprive us of.—Let us often entertain our ſouls with the love of God, and of the bleſſed Jeſus; and with the tranſporting pleaſures of that glorious place, where the Divine preſence is moſt eminently diſplayed; the hallelujahs of angels, the ſhouts of victory, the fruit of the tree of life, the ſtreams that water the Paradiſe of God. Let us think how inexpreſſible the Divine goodneſs is, that ſo graciouſly offers theſe ineſtimable treaſures to us; and how unbounded the love of our bleſſed Redeemer, who died to ſecure them unto us.—Such contemplations, if ſteadily purſued, will bring us equal profit and delight; they will gradually wean our hearts from all inordinate affection to any thing here below; they will leſſen our complaints, ſtrengthen our reſolutions, and help us to rejoice every day more and more, in hopes of the glory of God.—It is matter of daily complaint among the ſons of men, that our afflictions here are great, our temp-

tations ſtrong, and our comforts ſmall.—If then we deſire to make our uneaſineſs leſs, our enjoyments greater, and our temptations weaker, let us throw the comforts and proſpects of religion into the balance againſt them; and we ſhall ſoon feel the happy effect. Let us but fix our eyes ſteadily on the recompence of reward, and that will break the force of the ſtrongeſt temptations.—Let us think of the joys and pleaſures of heaven; and that will make us eaſily bear with all the fatigues and inconveniencies of our journey thither.—Let us often conſider, that we have but a little way to go, till we reach our father's houſe; the glories of which are ſo reſplendent, as to extinguiſh even the light of the ſun; and where the ſaints and ſervants of God, being fixed in the Divine preſence, enjoy one perpetual and everlaſting day, enlightened by the great Sun of Righteouſneſs, who is always riſing, and never ſets.—Theſe conſiderations, if duly imprinted upon our minds, are enough to overcome even the terrors of the grave itſelf; and to make us embrace with pleaſure that momentary death, which thus opens the door to an eternal weight of glory.—Let

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us then be *ſtedfaſt and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, foraſmuch as we know, that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.*—Let us ſhew, not only by our words, but much more by our actions, that God has really the poſſeſſion of our hearts; for this we may depend upon as an infallible truth, that unleſs we ſend our hearts to heaven before us, we ourſelves ſhall never be allowed to enter there.

DISCOURSE IX.

OBSERVANCE OF GOD'S LAWS,

THE ONLY TRUE WISDOM.

PSALM CXIX. 34.

Give me Underſtanding, and I ſhall keep thy Law.

WISDOM, or underſtanding, is a thing which all men are apt to value themſelves upon; and yet, alas! they who value themſelves the moſt on this account, have commonly the leaſt reaſon for it.—It is indeed the moſt excellent of all human accompliſhments; and yet, few men ſeem to underſtand wherein the true excellency of it conſiſts.—Some think themſelves very wiſe, if they can but look deeper than other men, and ſearch out the nature of thoſe things that are uncommon and abſtruſe:—others think themſelves very

underſtanding, if they can but look farther than other men, and take in a wide compaſs of things that are remote, and inſignificant:—whereas, the only way to excel in wiſdom, is to look higher than other men; to make heaven the object of our contemplation, and religion the rule of our life.—Which great truth is evidently implied in the words of my text. *Give me underſtanding*, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *and I ſhall keep thy law*; plainly teaching us, that the religious man is the only wiſe man; the only one who has any juſt pretence to underſtanding, or true wiſdom.—For, man, if he acts as a rational Being, muſt act from proper motives and inducements; and all his actions muſt have a tendency to ſome wiſe and good end.—With reſpect to himſelf, the main end of all, is the perfection and happineſs of his nature; the attainment of ſuch a ſtate, as will be moſt bliſsful and moſt laſting: and to purſue this end with conſtancy, and by juſt and proper meaſures, is true wiſdom;—as every deviation from it, or miſtake concerning it, is an equal degree of madneſs and folly. From all which it follows, that whatever bids

faireſt

faireſt to rectify men's errors in judgment and practice, with relation to the true happineſs and perfection of human nature, that ſcheme, whatever it be, has the juſteſt title to be called wiſdom, or the perfection of underſtanding.—This is what the Scripture always aſcribes to religion, or the fear and the love of God, and the obſervance of his laws. As Job ſays *, "*The fear of the Lord, that is* "*wiſdom, and to depart from evil, is un-*"*derſtanding.*" "*The fear of the Lord* (ſays the Pſalmiſt) *is the beginning of* "*wiſdom; a good underſtanding have all* "*they that do thereafter.*" And Solomon, throughout the whole book of Proverbs, diſtinguiſhes religious and irreligious men by the oppoſite titles of wiſemen and fools.—In diſcourſing therefore upon this ſubject, my general deſign is, to ſhew, that this teſtimony of the excellency of religion is by no means partial, or too favourable; but that it is exactly agreeable to truth, and the nature of things. And this I hope will ſufficiently appear from theſe following conſiderations. 1ſt, That the end re-

* xxviii. 28.

ligion

ligion propoſes, is the moſt noble and moſt worthy of a rational ſoul.—2dly, That this end is not imaginary, or beyond our reach, but attainable by us.—3dly, That when attained, it will fully anſwer all our expectations and deſires.—And 4thly, That, even before the chief and ultimate end of it is attained, it will in the mean time have the moſt happy influence upon us, in all our other circumſtances, employments, and purſuits.—Each of theſe points I ſhall endeavour to illuſtrate:—only give me leave to premiſe this general obſervation.

The greater part of the follies and diſappointments of mankind; or, rather, I may ſay, all of them, proceed from one or other of theſe cauſes:—that they either propoſe to themſelves low and baſe ends; or ſuch as are abſolutely, or probably at leaſt, out of their reach; and conſequently, all their labour, in the purſuit of theſe things, is vain:—or, if they attain, what they propoſed at firſt, they find little or no ſatisfaction in theſe things, and conſequently are as miſerable as when without them:—or, laſt of all, they involve themſelves in purpoſes and purſuits, which are contradictory,

or

or inconſiſtent the one with the other: and this neceſſarily occaſions to them a great deal of pain and diſquiet.—He then muſt ſurely deſerve the noble character and appellation of the wiſeſt and moſt prudent of men, who purſues the moſt noble ends, provided they are attainable, or fairly within his reach; and provided likewiſe, that they will be ſufficient to anſwer all his purpoſes when attained; and, in the mean time, and while he is in purſuit of them, will involve him in no perplexity or ſelf-contradiction, but will on the contrary tend, more than any thing elſe, to his preſent happineſs and peace.—And how far this is the religious man's caſe, is what I now propoſe to ſhew, from the ſeveral conſiderations, which I am to ſpeak to.

1ſt, then; I ſay, the end which religion propoſes to man, is the moſt noble and moſt worthy of a rational ſoul.—For, what end is ſo noble and worthy in itſelf, as the procuring the love and favour of Almighty God, and the advancing his glory in the world? What end ſo worthy of a rational ſoul, as that of anſwering the deſigns for which God brought it into being?—Now, theſe are the

the very ends which religion propoſes; theſe are the ends which the good man purſues both ſteadily and conſiſtently; and which he takes the wiſeſt and moſt effectual methods to attain.—Every intelligent Being, who allows himſelf to think at all, muſt be ſenſible of his dependence on that Supreme Being, to whom he owes himſelf and all that he has; and on whoſe favour or diſpleaſure his happineſs or miſery muſt depend.—Every man of common ſenſe muſt know, how little he can really do for himſelf; becauſe he can neither govern the powers of nature, nor command the paſſions and appetites of his fellow-creatures; and yet experience muſt convince him, that without he were able to do this, he cannot prolong his own exiſtence, or ſecure any one of his enjoyments ſo much as for a moment.—Now, when a man thus finds that he cannot, by himſelf, command his own happineſs, pray, what is he to do? Why, ſurely, if he has any true wiſdom, his next recourſe will be to Him who is beſt able, and moſt willing to ſecure it: and this can only be the God of nature, whoſe knowledge is infinite, and his power boundleſs.—He alone

alone can know the various wants and diſtreſſes of men; he alone can, with any certainty, remove and redreſs them; and therefore, the ſecuring his love and friendſhip, his aſſiſtance and protection, is ſurely the wiſeſt end that any man can purſue.—Now, if this be our underſtanding, to labour after the love and favour of God, religion alone can be this true wiſdom: for both our own reaſon, and his divine revelation, agree in telling us, that this is the only proper means for procuring his favour and aſſiſtance.—For, religion is plainly nothing elſe but the filial fear and love of God, and the yielding a conſtant and uniform obedience to his will, ſo far as it is known to us, or diſcoverable by us. And as it is our wiſdom to purſue it, becauſe it is ſo very beneficial unto us; ſo there is another thing which ſhews clearly the intrinſic wiſdom of religion in itſelf, and ſtrongly recommends it to us in that light; namely, becauſe it is one conſtant, regular, and ſteady principle of action.—Accordingly, we may ſee in fact, that the good man is ever ſteady and conſiſtent.—He has one general or chief point in view, which he knows

knows to be well worthy of all his labours; and therefore he purſues it with all the vigour and uniformity it deſerves. All his actions tend one way; all his thoughts and reflections center in it. We certainly muſt be ſenſible, that nothing argues greater folly and weakneſs of mind, than to be ever veering from point to point; to be now in purſuit of one thing, then of another; changing and ſhifting the objects of our deſire, or at leaſt the methods of attaining them, almoſt as often as our dreſs: this manifeſtly implies, either a want of judgment in the choice of our objects, or levity and inconſiſtency in the purſuit of them. And it is therefore a farther and moſt convincing argument of the religious man's wiſdom, that he never finds reaſon to alter his choice.—Experience confirms his judgment of things; and every ſtep he takes in his progreſs in piety, diſcovers new charms and lovelineſs in it, and attaches his heart more and more to it: the farther he proceeds, the more encouragement he finds; and the more he reflects, or looks back upon what is paſt, the more he is convinced, that it muſt be his beſt underſtanding

derſtanding to purſue the end for which he was created; and that he can no otherwiſe do this, than by a truly religious courſe of life.—Indeed, I am afraid it may too juſtly be ſaid, that there are but very few, who beſtow any ſerious or laſting thought upon the end for which God gave them a Being; yea, made them rational Beings, *i. e.* endued them with a power of thinking, and a liberty as to their moral actions. When we conſider this, what can we ſuppoſe to have been the deſign of an all-wiſe and all-good Being, in creating us thus, but that it was in order to our diſplaying his honour and glory, in the contemplation and imitation of his nature and works; to magnify his goodneſs, and imitate his perfections; and to improve thoſe noble faculties which he has given us, by dedicating them to his ſervice; and by employing them, as far as we are able, in the ſame or like acts of goodneſs and benevolence to others, of which God has given us ſo wonderfully ſhining an example, in every part of the creation? I ſay, what end leſs noble can we ſuppoſe worthy of an all-perfect and infinitely good Being, when he exerted his

his Almighty power in giving us life and reaſon? And what is it to purſue this end, in a regular and uninterrupted courſe, but, in other words, to be religious? to believe in, obey, and glorify the God who made and redeemed us; to improve and perfect the ſoul that animates us; and to love, comfort, and do good to all around us? This, and this only, is true religion; and a due ſenſe and conſideration of this, is that underſtanding which the Pſalmiſt ſo devoutly implores at the hands of God, in the words of my text. Give me underſtanding, to conſider what I am, and for what purpoſe I was made:—give me underſtanding, to diſcern, and wiſdom attentively to weigh and conſider what are the moſt rational, the moſt noble and ſublime purſuits, in which the mind of man can be employed:—give me this underſtanding, and the natural conſequence will be, that I ſhall keep thy law.—For, the laws of God are the only means to attain theſe glorious ends; they lead us through the ſeveral ſteps, by which we muſt advance to this final perfection: and therefore, to obey them is to know wiſdom and inſtruction, and to perceive the words of underſtanding.

derſtanding.——Which wiſdom will ſtill further appear, when we have conſidered the ſecond particular I propoſed to ſpeak unto; *viz.* That the end which religion propoſes, is not only thus noble, but is likewiſe attainable by us.

If it be wiſdom to purſue the moſt noble ends, it is only ſo, on condition that they be within our reach.—To employ our labour and application in the reach of any abſent good, how excellent ſoever in itſelf, which we can never attain, were vain and unprofitable, and therefore, very fooliſh.—And yet, this mark of folly evidently appears in moſt of thoſe views, which the world calls great and noble. For, worldly men ſet their hearts and affections upon things that are quite out of their own power; they propoſe attainments not only difficult and uncertain, but many of them abſolutely out of their reach; and therefore ſuch purſuits muſt needs end in certain ſorrow and diſappointment.—Riches, for example, neither are, nor can be, every man's portion; and power and diſtinction are the allotments only of a few. But every one knows, that many, yea very many,

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place their whole happineſs in theſe things; and therefore, the far greater part of that multitude muſt neceſſarily conſume their days in vanity, and their years in fruitleſs trouble. And accordingly, when their days are near an end, and death begins to ſtare them in the face, many of them are then ingenuous enough to acknowledge, that their whole life has been fooliſhly waſted in mere deluſive dreams, and in hunting after ſhadows.—But the religious man has this advantage, that he cannot be diſappointed.—The excellent end he purſues, he is ſure to compaſs: it is not in the power of men or devils to baulk him of it, either by force or fraud.—It is in every man's power to believe the truths of religion; to be chaſte and temperate, juſt and benevolent, humble, pious, and devout: he may, if he will, through the aid of Divine grace, which is never wanting to any man, if he be not wanting to himſelf; I ſay, he may be continually endeavouring to improve his own faculties, and to promote the honour of his Maker.—Every advance in chriſtian graces and virtues, is a ſtep to perfection;

tion; and whoever does moſt good to others, is ſure to do moſt ſervice to himſelf: he is ſure to improve his own mind, and to pleaſe his God: he is ſure to draw down upon himſelf the bleſſings of Heaven, and to procure the aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit: he is ſure to meet with no difficulty in his way, which will be too hard for him to conquer, and to beſtow no labour, which ſhall not meet with an abundant reward. And therefore, to labour after a conſcience void of offence towards God and towards man, is every man's true wiſdom; becauſe it is purſuing an end not only great, but within his reach.—It is in his own power, through the grace of his bleſſed Redeemer, to improve daily in it; and by ſo doing, ſecure that happineſs hereafter, which will exceed his expectation, and is beyond expreſſion.

And this would naturally lead me to the third conſideration, by which I propoſed to ſhew the wiſdom of religion; *viz.* That the end which it has in view, is not only the moſt noble, and moſt eaſily attainable; but, when attained, will fully anſwer all our expectations and deſires. But I ſhall defer ſpeaking to this now,

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and conclude at preſent with a ſhort improvement of what you have already heard.——And here let me addreſs myſelf in particular to thoſe who are young, and who are yet but entering upon the world, and have had little or no experience of the vanity of all ſublunary things. To theſe the ſeveral objects of ſenſe are continually preſenting themſelves; the gaudy phantoms of honours, riches, or ſenſual pleaſures, are dancing before their eyes, courting and ſolliciting their affections, and each of them, as it were, crying with a loud voice, Here! and here only, is true happineſs to be found! Whilſt wicked and irreligious men are, both by their example and diſcourſe, expreſſing their contempt of every thing ſacred and ſerious: and, though their heart does not fail, very often, to give the lie to their tongue, they affect to treat a life of regular piety and ſtrict virtue, with the ſtrongeſt ridicule and ſcorn.—Hence it is that the young and unwary are led ſo early into the paths of vice; and taught to deſpiſe all the maxims and precepts of true wiſdom. They are encouraged to follow Solo-

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mon's ironical advice, as if he had been really in earneſt when he ſaid, "*Re-*
"*joice, O young man, in thy youth, and*
"*let thy heart chear thee in the days of*
"*thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy*
"*heart, and the ſight of thine eyes*;" but they mind not the check that he gives them in the very next words, where he ſhews them the precipices to which theſe headſtrong courſes will lead them, and bids them be wiſe before it be too late: "*But know thou* (ſays he) *that for all*
"*theſe things God will bring thee into*
"*judgment.*" And then, as the author of the Book of Wiſdom hath beautifully deſcribed it; "*then ſhall the righteous*
"*man ſtand in great boldneſs before the*
"*face of ſuch as made no account of his*
"*labours.*" When they ſee it, they ſhall be troubled with terrible fear, and ſhall be amazed at the ſtrangeneſs of his ſalvation, ſo far beyond all that they looked for. And they, repenting, and groaning with anguiſh of ſpirit, ſhall ſay within themſelves, *We fools accounted his*
"*life madneſs, and his end to be without*
"*honour: How is he numbered among the*
"*children of God! and his lot is among the*

" *ſaints!*" Such will one day be the thoughts and confeſſion of thoſe, who at preſent deſpiſe and revile religion as a fooliſh vulgar thing, and below the notice of their more refined and enlightened underſtanding, as they vainly imagine.—Let me therefore caution all, but eſpecially the young and unwary, to beware of the converſation of thoſe who ſpeak lightly of religion; for, whatever wit may ſeem to be in ſuch diſcourſe; and poor and falſe wit it is indeed which is employed to ſuch a purpoſe; they who talk thus, are utterly void of true wiſdom; they neither know what they are doing here, nor conſider what is to become of them through all eternity.—Leave it then to the men of this world, to act and ſpeak as if there was no God in the world: theſe, however high and honourable, however wiſe or learned they may ſeem at preſent, are utterly void of true underſtanding, and may juſtly be compared to the beaſts that periſh. But ſay thou unto wiſdom, *Thou art my ſiſter, and call underſtanding thy kinſwoman:* and remember that remarkable paſſage of the Pſalmiſt,

Pſalmiſt, which I quoted before, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wiſdom; a good underſtanding have all they that do thereafter; the praiſe of it endureth for ever.*—May God grant us this true underſtanding.

DISCOURSE X.

THE FORMER SUBJECT CONTINUED.

PSALM CXIX. 34.

Give me Underſtanding, and I ſhall keep thy Law.

AS man is diſtinguiſhed from the lower part of the creation by the ſovereignty and excellency of his reaſon; ſo it is expected from him, that he ſhould act up to the dignity of his nature, and employ his life, and all his noble faculties, to the purpoſes for which they were given him.—For a creature of his rank and quality to be occupied about mere trifles, and lie grovelling in ſenſuality; for an heir apparent of immortal life to be always purſuing the paths of death and deſtruction; and for the image of God's own eternity to look no higher than the tran-

ſitory joys of this world, and feaſt his imaginations with fleſh and ſenſe; this is a diſgrace to his extraction, a contradiction to the end of his being, and ſuch an abuſe of his Creator's favour, goodneſs, and protection, as renders him very unworthy of its continuance, either here or hereafter.—It is therefore incumbent upon every man, who pretends to any degree of wiſdom, to be always cultivating that better part, which can only yield him true and laſting bliſs; to leave ignoble purſuits to mean and ſordid ſpirits, and the enjoyments of earth to thoſe who have no knowledge or deſire of heaven; whilſt his ſoul aſpires at nothing leſs than to be wiſe as an angel here, and happy as theſe celeſtial Beings hereafter: which wiſdom and happineſs is only to be attained by the belief and practice of true religion, and making the laws of God the rule of our conduct. *Give me underſtanding, and I ſhall keep thy law*, ſays the Pſalmiſt; plainly intimating, that they who do not obſerve the laws of God are void of underſtanding; and that true wiſdom and religion go hand in hand together.

In order to make it appear that this

is not too favourable or partial a teſtimony concerning the wiſdom and excellency of religion, I propoſed to conſider the following particulars:

1ſt, That the end which religion propoſes is the moſt noble, and moſt worthy of a rational ſoul.

2dly, That this end is not imaginary, or beyond our reach, but attainable by us.

3dly, That when attained, it will fully anſwer all our expectations and deſires.

And, 4thly, That, till it is attained, it will in the mean time have the moſt happy influence upon us, in all our other circumſtances, employments, and purſuits.

As to the firſt of theſe, I ſhewed, that man being unable to command his own happineſs, his trueſt wiſdom, and only ſafety is, to have recourſe to that Supreme Being on whom it depends, and to ſecure his love and friendſhip, by obedience to his will, and by endeavouring, with all humility and gratitude, to anſwer thoſe gracious ends for which God gave him a being, and ſent him into this

world: And what were theſe, but to believe in, glorify, and obey the God who made and redeemed us; to improve and perfect the ſoul that animates us; and to love, comfort, and do good to all around us? This, and this only, is true religion; and a due ſenſe and conſideration of this, is that underſtanding which the Pſalmiſt ſo devoutly implores at the hands of God, when he ſays, *Give me underſtanding, and I ſhall keep thy law.*

As to the ſecond point, That this moſt noble and rational end, which religion propoſes, is attainable by us; I mentioned, that they who ſet their hearts upon any other end, propoſe things to themſelves, which are not only at all times difficult and uncertain, but are many times abſolutely out of their reach: whence it is, that the far greater part of mankind, when they draw towards the end of life, find to their ſorrow, that they have only conſumed their days in vanity, and their years in fruitleſs trouble. Whereas the truly religious man is ſure of the end he purſues; for nothing can deprive us of the love, and favour, and protection of God, but the treachery of our own hearts, and our wilful

wilful diſobedience to his holy and righteous laws.

It is in every man's power, through the aid of Divine Grace, to keep a conſcience void of offence towards God, and towards man; to improve his mind, and make continual advances in grace and virtue; and by ſo doing ſecure that future happineſs which is beyond all our preſent expreſſions or conceptions.

And this brings us to the third particular which I propoſed to illuſtrate, *viz.* That another proof of the wiſdom of religion is this: — The end which it propoſes is not only moſt noble, and moſt certainly attainable, but when attained, it will fully anſwer all our expectations and deſires. — Do but conſider the nature of all the various entertainments and delights which this world affords, and which the ſons of men ſo earneſtly ſet their hearts upon, and you muſt acknowledge they have univerſally this defect — that, though they ſatiate, they cannot ſatisfy. — If they gratify one appetite, they leave others craving. — If they could indulge all the inferior faculties in the higheſt degree, the mind would ſtill be reſtleſs, and anxiouſly

aſpire after higher gratifications. And even ſuppoſing they could gratify every appetite, both ſenſitive and rational, they would ſtill be wanting in duration, though not in degree; and, in the midſt of them all, the man would be in pain and diſquietude, for fear of daily loſing what he knows to depend on ſo precarious a tenure as frail human life.—But the pleaſures and rewards of religion are allowed to be as pure and perfect as they are certain.—This is readily granted by all who admit that there are any ſuch things.—The glimmerings of reaſon diſcover ſomething of it; or rather, perhaps, I ſhould ſay, it is a truth which is no ſooner propoſed and explained to us, than our reaſon acquieſces in it, and the teſtimony of revelation puts it beyond all doubt.

If we could ſuppoſe any thing wanting in the rewards of religion, either as to the degree, or the duration of them, it muſt proceed from one or other of theſe three cauſes:—Either from the inability of the giver of the reward;—from its being ill ſuited to the nature or faculties of him who receives it;—or from the periſhing nature of the perſon enjoying,

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or of the thing enjoyed.—But none of thoſe caſes can happen in the future manſions of bliſs.—The God of nature can want no power.—What he propoſes for making his ſervants happy, and for the gratifying all their wiſhes and deſires, muſt be every way equal to that end: and in the New Jeruſalem, the place of their future and final reward, every thing of a periſhable nature will be done away.—This, as I ſaid before, is ſo entirely conſonant to reaſon, that nothing can be objected againſt it; and we know it to be a certain truth, by the declarations of God himſelf. And indeed, this is all we ſhall or can know of the future glory, till our preſent imperfections are removed, and till mortality is ſwallowed up in life.—All the images we can now form of future happineſs, are but very faint and imperfect repreſentations of what ſhall be hereafter.—Nothing that we know, or converſe with on earth, can convey to us equal ſentiments of heavenly objects; we now ſee all celeſtial joys but darkly, as through a glaſs. But this we know, that the happineſs of heaven will be the happineſs of the whole man; and that we ſhall then know, as

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we ourſelves are known.—And it matters not of what kind theſe enjoyments are, or how they are to be conveyed to or received by the ſoul; all we want and deſire is, perfect faculties, and perfect bliſs.—And ſince the religious man is aſſured that theſe will be his portion at laſt, though he cannot deſcribe nor comprehend the nature of theſe things at preſent, yet this is ſufficient to demonſtrate the wiſdom of his choice, in thus purſuing an end that will fully anſwer all his deſires and expectations.—But to all this the ſenſual man will perhaps object, that theſe joys, how perfect and how certain ſoever, muſt yet be allowed to be at a diſtance; and that great abatement ought to be made on that account, with reſpect to the prudence of preferring them, when weighed in the balance with thoſe which are certain, and nearer at hand. And therefore I add, as a farther proof of the wiſdom of religion, that the good man not only chooſes ſuch an end as is moſt noble, moſt attainable, and moſt ſatisfactory and bliſsful at laſt, but alſo ſuch a one as will,

4thly, Have the moſt happy influences

ences upon him in all his other purſuits, till ſuch time as he arrives at the enjoyment of it: — or, in other words, The belief and practice of true religion will not only procure a man eternal felicity hereafter, but will likewiſe be of the greateſt advantage to him here in the mean time, and will have the moſt happy effects upon his mind in whatever laudable purſuits he is engaged, or in whatever ſituation or circumſtances of life he may happen to be. —And, in order to make this appear, let us place a man in the worſt, and in the beſt lights we can ſuppoſe him, with regard to his worldly circumſtances: let us conſider him, I ſay, in each of theſe ſituations, and obſerve what effect religion will have upon him.

1ſt, Let us ſuppoſe a man poor and deſpiſed, quite neglected, and out of repute; in a word, wanting every thing that the men of this world call great and good: and if you ſuppoſe him likewiſe to be without religion, will he not be wretched beyond expreſſion? To what refuge can ſuch a one betake himſelf, either without or within him? Without, he meets with nothing but ſcorn, inſults,

inſults, and reproaches; within, he feels nothing but gnawing appetites which he cannot ſatisfy, and tormenting paſſions which he cannot conquer: he is without proſpect of redreſs, or hope of comfort: God deſerts him, men deſpiſe and abuſe him; yea, he deſpiſes, and even loaths himſelf.—In ſhort, he drags on a miſerable, animal life, which is more wretched than that of the loweſt brutes; inaſmuch as he is conſcious of his miſery, which they are not.—But now, on the other hand, if we ſuppoſe this man, whoſe outward circumſtances are ſo low and loathſome, to make religion his conſtant concern, how vaſtly different will his caſe then be! He will then be all joyous within, however gloomy without.—Gleams of light will break in upon him, in the midſt of all his ſorrows.—He can account for his ſufferings, and learn to bear them, in ſome meaſure with alacrity, but at leaſt with patience.—His peace of mind gives him a firmneſs of ſoul, which is proof againſt all the frowns and ſeverities of the world.—He ſtands like a rock in a tempeſtuous ſeaſon; the winds and waves may beat againſt him, and a little

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mar or change his ſurface, or outward appearance, but they cannot overturn him; and in the midſt of all, his hope in his God and Saviour is a well-ſpring of joy, of which he cannot be deprived. It darts beams of light through the thickeſt clouds; and he has at leaſt this great, this unſpeakable comfort, that he knows his miſery will ſoon be at an end, and be followed by an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. — So much on the ſuppoſition that a man is poor and deſtitute, or in low and diſtreſſed circumſtances in the world.

Let us now turn our view to the oppoſite extreme.—Let us ſuppoſe a man arrived at the higheſt pitch of human glory; and imagine him to be the richeſt, the moſt powerful, or the moſt voluptuous of men; and let us conſider what this man's caſe will be, with, and without religion. — All things ſmile about him; men reverence and admire him; and all is, in appearance, joy and tranſport: every appetite is courted, and every inclination gratified.—But, notwithſtanding all theſe flattering appearances, has he nothing within him to torment him?—Has he no paſſions to conquer,

quer, the indulgence of which will give him continual diſquiet?—Is he ſure not to deſire another world, when he is maſter of this?—Is he ſure not to be choleric and peeviſh; and not be angry, becauſe he cannot command the powers of nature too?—Can he look on others, who are better, though leſs powerful than himſelf, without envy or jealouſy?—If not, ſuch paſſions will imbitter his beſt enjoyments, and he will ſtill be liable to diſappointment and miſery.—Human paſſions ſeldom loſe ground by being gratified or indulged: and ſad experience may convince the world, that men who are in this ſtate; men who have all the outward means of gratifying their paſſions, and are not reſtrained or conducted by inward principles of duty, have proved in fact, not only a curſe to mankind, but an inſupportable burthen to themſelves.—Look into hiſtory, and you will find them generally as deep in diſquietude and perſonal vexation, as in blood: even the gratification of their appetites torments them; and by the very act of making others miſerable, they ſhew that they are miſerable themſelves.—But perhaps you will

will ſay, this is ſuppoſing the very worſt of them; and that they are not only wicked, but weak and fooliſh too.—Well! we ſhall farther ſuppoſe our man of power and wealth to be a man of natural ſagacity and prudence; and that he has the diſcretion to reſtrain his appetites, in a great meaſure, merely for the ſake of his own eaſe and quiet:—And yet all this will not ſecure him from many inward fears and perplexities:—as for example, from the fear of ſickneſs and death.—Allowing him to be temperate, that does not ſay that he muſt be unthinking too.—Either he has a high taſte and reliſh of his pleaſures, or he has not.—If he has not, where is his happineſs?—If he has, ſurely he muſt be anxious about preſerving them; and the thoughts that they may be interrupted by ſickneſs, or that he may be deprived of them by death, muſt be, at leaſt ſometimes, very uneaſy and grievous to him.—Nay, let us go as far as imagination can reach; let us ſuppoſe him to be brave, as well as regular, and able to face ſickneſs or death with very little concern; yet, after all, his enjoyments riſe no higher than mere ſenſuality.

ity.—He can have no pleaſure, but what ariſes from the gratification of his ſenſes, or from reflections on his preſent unreſtrained, but fleeting power.—The ſublime pleaſures that flow from the love of God and heavenly things, are utterly unknown to him; and the very beſt that can poſſibly be made of his caſe is this,—that he revels in luſt and luxury for a few years, without controul, and then diſappears and periſhes for ever;—or, in other words, that he lives a happy brute, and dies one.

But now, if we ſuppoſe a man with all theſe outward advantages of wealth and power, to enjoy likewiſe the ſuperior comforts of religion, what a noble luſtre will theſe give to all the reſt?—What a calm and ſerenity of mind do they produce?—How happy is ſuch a man in himſelf, and what a bleſſing to mankind?—His power is a general benefit to all within his reach; and, while he employs it in relieving, protecting, and ſupporting others, every ſuch action repays him with double joy and conſolation in his own heart.—His riches are like gentle ſhowers in a thirſty ſoil; not only a few individuals, but the whole

whole community in which he lives, is refreſhed by them; and the more benefit they reap, the more his ſatisfaction riſes. —He is the idol of man, and the favourite of Heaven:—he enjoys all that mortal man can do, without fear or danger: he has nothing to reproach himſelf withal, and it is every man's intereſt to preſerve him: his turbulent paſſions are under the reſtraints of reaſon and religion; and he therefore ſuffers as little from them as is conſiſtent with a ſtate of imperfection: he feels not the weight of the inevitable calamities of human life, becauſe God anſwers him in the joy of his heart: and he has no reaſon to be afraid or unwilling to reſign his enjoyments, becauſe he well knows they are but the pledges of an infinitely better inheritance.—In ſhort, he lives the life, and reaps the ſatisfactions, of a rational Being; and he dies in peace, with a heart full of the hopes of a happy reſurrection, and a bleſſed immortality.

And this, I hope, is ſufficient to make it appear what happy influences the belief and practice of religion will have on the minds of men, in any circumſtances; upon the rich and powerful, as well as

the poor and the oppreſſed. Hence may appear the ineſtimable value of theſe benefits, which the world can neither give nor take away; and conſequently we may all be convinced how exceeding preferable even oppreſſed virtue and deſpiſed innocence are to the moſt proſperous and triumphant wickedneſs.—Alas! neither the moſt affluent fortune, nor the deepeſt ſolitude, can ſcreen a bad man from himſelf.—As, on the other hand, neither want nor violence can rob a good man of his peace.—To all which, if we add the greatneſs, and the ſufficiency of the future rewards of piety, and the eaſe with which they may be attained, it ſurely cannot be doubted, that religion is the only true wiſdom; and that all the underſtanding which men can boaſt of, without this, is nothing but a courſe of laborious and vexatious folly.

May God give us grace to conſider this, before the ſeaſon is paſt;—for, if we will not be perſuaded of it during our life, yet we ſhall certainly be convinced at laſt, when death will correct our error, but cannot amend it.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XI.

HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE, THE ONLY SURE FOUNDATION OF HAPPINESS.

JOB xxvii. 8.

For what is the hope of the Hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his ſoul?

IT was no ſmall addition to Job's other afflictions; nay, it was perhaps the very greateſt trial of his patience, that his friends, who pretended to come and comfort him, did little elſe than reproach and upbraid him. They told him plainly that he was an hypocrite; and that the miſerable condition he was in was the juſt puniſhment of his pretending to be religious, and a man of integrity, juſtice, and goodneſs, when he really was not ſo: for, as Bildad ſaid, *God will not caſt away a perfect or ſincere*

 man;

man; if thou wert pure and upright, ſurely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteouſneſs proſperous; but the hypocrite's hope ſhall periſh, and his truſt ſhall be as a ſpider's web; which, though artfully contrived to take its prey, yet is often too weak to hold it, and is preſently broken through and deſtroyed. Such ſevere cenſures as theſe did his miſerable comforters, as he elegantly calls them, at every turn paſs upon him; and theſe inſults ſo touched him to the quick, that they almoſt robbed him of the glory of his patience, and extorted from him ſuch a vindication of his ſincerity, as the humility of ſo good a man would not otherwiſe have ſuffered him to make. One of the ſtrongeſt proteſtations of his innocency, is that which he makes in the 5th, 6th, and 7th verſes of this chapter: *Till I die* (ſays he) *I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteouſneſs I hold faſt, and will not let it go; my heart ſhall not reproach me ſo long as I live. Let mine enemy be as the wicked, and he that riſeth up againſt me, as the unrighteous.* After which, to ſhew his contempt of hypocriſy, as well as his deteſtation of it, he adds, in the words of the text, *For what "is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath "gained,*

" *gained, when God taketh away his ſoul?*" —— From all which we are not to infer, that Job looked upon himſelf as entirely innocent, and altogether without ſin; for, on the contrary, when he ſpeaks of himſelf with regard to God, he expreſſes himſelf in a quite different manner *; " *If I juſtify myſelf, my own* " *mouth ſhall condemn me; if I ſay I am* " *perfect, my own mouth ſhall prove me* " *perverſe.*" But, with regard to great crimes, which his friends argued he muſt have been guilty of, becauſe of his preſent adverſity; from theſe he conſtantly clears himſelf with great ſteadineſs; and proves that they argued very wrongfully for God, when they ſuppoſed, that no other cauſe could be aſſigned for Job's being thus afflicted, but only his hypocriſy, or hidden wickedneſs. And, to ſhew his deteſtation of all ſuch hypocriſy (throughout the following part of this chapter) he expoſes the wickedneſs and vanity of it, in the ſtrongeſt and moſt elegant terms. Nothing can be more expreſſive of this, than the words of my text, and the two verſes that follow: " *For what is the* " *hope of the hypocrite, though he hath*

* Chap. ix. 20.

" *gained, when God taketh away his ſoul?*
" *Will God hear his cry when trouble*
" *cometh upon him? Will he delight him-*
" *ſelf in the Almighty? Will he always*
" *call upon God?*"—As if he had ſaid,—Allowing a hypocrite to have made all the advantage of his hypocriſy, that you can ſuppoſe or imagine; yet what has he to hope for at his death, or when God taketh away his ſoul? As he has no reaſon to expect that God will hear him, then, or when he is in his greateſt trouble; ſo it is as little to be ſuppoſed that he will then endeavour to keep up the hypocritical farce he has been all his life acting; the maſk will then fall off; and he will ſhew that he has no real regard for, or truſt in that Being, whom he had pretended to adore and worſhip before. " *Will he delight*
" *himſelf in the Almighty? Will he always*
" *call upon God?*" No; it is ſcarce to be ſuppoſed that he will perſevere in a practice which he knows will be to no purpoſe; for what hope or expectation can he have of reaping any farther benefit by it, when God is taking away his ſoul, however much he may have gained by it formerly?

My text being thus explained, I ſhall

go on, with the Divine assistance, to discourse from it in the following method.

1st, I shall consider what sorts of men, according to the language and meaning of Scripture, fall under the denomination of religious hypocrites.

2dly, I shall shew the weakness and insufficiency of all the hopes which the hypocrite can propose to himself; and the great disproportion between the gain he may make by his hypocrisy here, and the loss he must suffer by it hereafter.

And what I say upon each of these heads, I shall endeavour to apply in some suitable inferences and reflections.

1st, then, Let us enquire what sorts of men, according to the language and meaning of Scripture, fall under the denomination of religious hypocrites.—The original word, Ὑποκριτὴς, Hypocrite, is borrowed from the stage, and signifies an actor, or one who, under a borrowed dress, represents a person, which he really is not. For the e, a beggarly debauchee often acts the part of a virtuous prince or hero; and a strumpet,

that of a virtuous wife or modeſt virgin.—But, in the Scripture ſenſe of the word, it is uſed, only, to denote a man who pretends, and ſeems to the world, to have ſuch a regard for religion, and ſuch a degree of Chriſtian purity and true holineſs, as he has not. And of theſe hypocrites there are ſeveral kinds, according to the different degrees of hypocriſy of which they are guilty. The greateſt, and moſt criminal of all theſe ſinners, are they, who having at bottom no real regard for religion, nor any ſincere belief of the goſpel, do yet put on an uncommon appearance of zeal for God and his ſervice, in order to carry on ſome worldly or corrupt ends. Such were thoſe Phariſees of old, whom our Saviour compares to ſepulchres outwardly whitened, or clean and ornamented; but inwardly, full of rottenneſs, and dead men's bones. And, alas! there have been but too many of this kind of Phariſees in the Chriſtian church, as well as in the Jewiſh: men, who have put on a maſk of religion, in order to ſcreen and more ſafely perpetrate the greateſt and moſt daring villainies: and who have attained the higheſt pitch of power, riches, and popularity,

popularity, by pretending to protect and advance the intereſt of a religion, which in their hearts they deſpiſed, and even hated, as much as its moſt avowed enemies could do.

Crowns and kingdoms have been obtained by this art: nor has the mitre eſcaped being polluted by it, any more than the others; nay, perhaps oftener than any thing elſe.

Hiſtory, both civil and eccleſiaſtical, is full of inſtances of this kind. And beſides thoſe left on record, we may eaſily think, from our own experience and obſervation of what daily paſſes in the world, that there muſt have been many more of the like kind.

How many of the moſt notorious cheats in their dealings, have made the loudeſt pretences to ſanctity with their tongues? and even made their houſes and ſtreets ring with the ſound of their pretended devotions; whilſt in many of the moſt important tranſactions of their lives, they have moſt groſsly violated all laws of truth and juſtice? ſo literally have they imitated thoſe Phariſees, of whom our Lord ſays, that while they devoured widows houſes, yet for a pretence, they made long prayers.

And is it any breach of charity to ſay, that they are not a whit better, who, under the maſk of chriſtian charity, moderation, mutual forbearance, and univerſal benevolence, diſguiſe their careleſſneſs and indifference about the moſt eſſential truths of religion; and endeavour to inſtill the ſame lukewarmneſs into others?

In fine, there have been but too many, in all ages and of all profeſſions, who have put on a form of godlineſs, without any regard to the power thereof; and who, while they pretended to ſerve and honour God with an outſide devotion, yet either ſaid in their hearts, that there was no God; or, if they had any ſenſe or belief of a Divine Being, entertained ſuch vile and contemptible notions of him, as were much the ſame in effect with downright atheiſm, and naturally led them to have no fear of God before their eyes.—This, then, is the firſt and higheſt degree of hypocriſy; when men with a formed deſign, and deliberate intention, endeavour to carry on worldly and corrupt ends, under a pretence of religion, and an appearance of ſerving God.—Now, the word Hypocriſy

criſy being generally uſed in this firſt and worſt ſenſe, when men find themſelves free of this greateſt and moſt hateful degree of it, they are too apt immediately to flatter themſelves, that they are, in no ſenſe, hypocrites. But the Scripture frequently uſes the ſame word in ſeveral lower ſenſes; and, though men be not ſuch profligates as thoſe I have been ſpeaking of, yet, too many of them may be juſtly charged with being guilty of a lower degree of hypocriſy.

Such, for inſtance, are they, who do not abſolutely caſt off all religion, do not in their hearts totally deſpiſe it, but yet content themſelves with ſome eaſy formal parts of it, and think thereby to atone for their neglect of the reſt. Theſe, I ſay, the Scripture always includes under the character and denomination of hypocrites. This is that ſpecies of hypocriſy for which Samuel reproved Saul *; "*Hath the Lord as great de-*
"*light in ſacrifices, as in obeying the*
"*voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is*
"*better than ſacrifice, and to hearken,*

* 1 Sam. xv. 22.

" *than the fat of rams.*" And it is for the ſame that the prophet Hoſea reproves the whole people of the Jews, when he ſays, " *I deſired mercy, and not* " *ſacrifice; and the knowledge of God more* " *than burnt-offerings.*" This was alſo, in our Saviour's days, the caſe of the better ſort of Phariſees; for they were not all of them ſuch abandoned hypocrites, as to be void of all religion in their hearts; but yet, even the beſt of them ſeem to have been ſuperſtitiouſly exact as to ſmall things, while they neglected greater.—Theſe our Lord ſtiles hypocrites, for teaching as doctrines the commandments of men; putting mere human inſtitutions upon a level with divine ones; nay, giving them, in many caſes, the preference. — For inſtance, when they pretended to put into the Corban, or public treaſury, towards the repair of the temple, what they ought rather to have employed in maintaining their poor indigent parents: and when they were zealous in obſerving the cuſtoms of their forefathers, as to the frequent waſhing of hands, and of cups; and preciſe in paying the tithe of mint, aniſe, and cummin; things of very little

value; while they omitted the weightier matters of the law,—Judgment, Mercy, and Faith.

So likewiſe, when they were more ſollicitous about the obſervation of the ſabbath; which it is true was their duty to obſerve, as being commanded by God; than to do the works of mercy, goodneſs, and charity, our Saviour brands them with the name of hypocrites; as we ſee in the caſe of the ruler of the ſynagogue *: "*Thou hypocrite,*" ſays our Lord to him, "*ought not this woman,* "*being a daughter of Abraham, to be* "*looſed from this bond* (*i. e.* the diſeaſe ſhe had laboured under) "*on the ſab-* "*bath-day.*" In ſhort, whoever thinks to compound matters with God; to put him off with any thing ſhort of ſincere and univerſal obedience to all his laws; however zealous he may be as to the performance of ſome duties, that beſt ſuit with his own taſte or natural inclination; or that happen to be the duties he hath been moſt accuſtomed to, by education, and the example of thoſe among whom he lives; ſuch a perſon

* St. Luke xiii. 15.

(though he go not upon the principles of atheiſm and infidelity, like the former and worſt claſs of hypocrites) is nevertheleſs, far from being a true, and ſincere Chriſtian; and will find at laſt, that it is not every profeſſion of religion that will be accepted; it is not every one who ſaith unto Chriſt, Lord, Lord, that will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but they only who do the will of his Father who is in heaven.

And like to theſe, are another ſort of men, whoſe behaviour comes under the name of hypocriſy, in the Scripture ſenſe, however little they may think of it; I mean thoſe, who acknowledging the neceſſity of leading a virtuous and holy life, in order to their being true Chriſtians, are always reſolving to repent, and forſake their evil ways, yet can never find in their hearts to give up their darling ſins, and repent and reform effectually. This is a ſort of hypocriſy, by which men impoſe upon themſelves more than upon others.—This is that deceitfulneſs of ſin, which trains and draws them on from day to day, with the vain hope, that it will be eaſier for them to amend their ways ſome time afterwards,

than

than at preſent: and it is againſt this deceit, that our Saviour warns us ſo very earneſtly and affectionately * as he well knew, there is not any one deceit or ſtratagem of the great deceiver, more common, or more fatal to the ſons of men: "*Watch therefore,*" ſays he, "*for ye know not what hour your Lord* "*doth come.*"—"*Be ye alſo ready; for in* "*ſuch an hour as ye think not,—the ſon* "*of man cometh—Bleſſed is that ſervant* "*whom his Lord when he cometh ſhall find* "*ſo doing.—But, and if that evil ſervant* "*ſhall ſay in his heart, My Lord delayeth* "*his coming; and ſhall begin to ſmite his* "*fellow-ſervants, and to eat and drink* "*with the drunken,—the Lord of that* "*ſervant ſhall come in a day that he* "*looketh not for him, and in an hour* "*that he is not aware of, and ſhall cut* "*him aſunder, and appoint him his por-* "*tion with the hypocrites.*"

Once more.—The Scriptures repreſent thoſe as a ſort of hypocrites, who have actually ſet about, and begun their repentance, but are always falling back and relapſing, even into thoſe very ſins,

* St. Matth. xxiv.

which

which they had for ſome little time forſaken. In our Saviour's noted parable of the ſower, men of this kind are repreſented by the ſtony ground; in which, though the ſeed ſprang up forthwith, it as quickly withered; *i. e.* as our Lord himſelf explained it; though ſuch men receive the word with joy, they have no root in themſelves, and ſo endure but a while; and, either upon the approach of perſecution, or the aſſault of a temptation from ſome beloved ſin, they quickly fall away. Their heart, as the Scripture expreſſeth it, is not whole, or right with God; their affections are divided between him and the world: and while they continue in this languid, wavering ſtate, they are plainly of the number of thoſe, who, as our bleſſed Lord ſays, ſhall ſeek to enter in at the ſtrait gate, but ſhall not be able.

However, though theſe men are at preſent but in an evil ſtate, yet they are by no means ſo bad as the others, who are hypocrites in a proper ſenſe of the word. There is in them a root of ſome love to virtue, which affords great hope, that it may ſpring up in time unto righteouſneſs and life eternal. They are the bruiſed

bruiſed reed, that ought not to be broken; and the ſmoaking flax, which ought not to be quenched. They are, what the apoſtle calls, the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; the lame, which ought not to be turned out of the way, but that it rather be healed.

Such weak, unſteady Chriſtians, ought not to be terrified and driven into deſpair; but to be often exhorted, with meekneſs and compaſſion, that they finiſh their repentance, and compleat the great work of their reformation, while their day of grace laſteth, and before the night cometh, when no man can work.

Thus I have briefly ſhewn the ſeveral ſorts of hypocrites (in the Scripture ſenſe of that word) and theſe according to the different ſorts and degrees of hypocriſy.

Allow me now, before I proceed to the ſecond article of my diſcourſe, to exhort you, to make the proper uſe of what you have already heard: That is, to learn thereby, not to judge our neighbour, — but let every one try whether there be any degree of hypocriſy lurking in our hearts, and ſeriouſly examine

and

and judge ourſelves; that we be not judged of the Lord.—Let us aſk ourſelves, whether we profeſs Chriſtianity from a ſincere and rational conviction of its being the only true religion, and the only way to attain eternal life, through the mercy of God, and the merits of Chriſt Jeſus;—or,—whether we content ourſelves with an implicit belief, and careleſs profeſſion of what was taught us in our childhood, without being able to give any ſolid reaſon for the hope and the faith that is in us?—When we do any thing good or praiſeworthy, is it with a ſincere deſign to glorify God, and to render him an acceptable obedience?—Or, is it only for the ſake of faſhion, and that we may be eſteemed and well ſpoken of, by thoſe who ſee, or hear of ſuch performances?—Is our religion the ſame in private, as it is in public?—Are we as careful of the inward rectitude and purity of our hearts, as of the outward regularity of our behaviour?—Are we really grieved and troubled, when at any time we are tempted, or ſurpriſed into any tranſgreſſion of God's holy will?—

And,

And, do we then fully reſolve, to be more watchful, circumſpect, and careful of being true to our God and our duty for the future?—And, is this our endeavour after better obedience, entire; without exception of any known part of our duty; and without reſerve in favour of any one vice or evil habit, which we are moſt addicted to, or find hardeſt to give up? — Or, have we put off our reformation from time to time; always pretending that we reſolve to grow better, but never actually avoiding or reſiſting any temptation that is wont to lead us aſtray?—And, finally, Are we reſolved to hold faſt the profeſſion of the true faith, and to keep a good conſcience, in times of danger and perſecution, as well as in time of peace? —Do we purpoſe, through God's grace, to ſuffer for the truth, rather than forſake it; ſhould God ſee fit thus to make trial of our ſincerity?

Theſe, and ſuch like enquiries, will make great diſcoveries; and will probably ſhew us more of our religion and of ourſelves, than ever we took notice of before. And he who has the teſtimony,

mony of a good conſcience in theſe particulars, let him, in the name of God, go on and proſper: notwithſtanding he may be ſenſible of innumerable failings, defects, and imperfections, let him not be too much diſcouraged, or doubt of his being a ſincere Chriſtian: for, he muſt not expect to attain abſolute perfection, in this preſent imperfect ſtate. If our intention is good, and our practice regular and religious, to the beſt of our knowledge and ability: if we are heartily penitent for what we have done amiſs; and heartily purpoſe and endeavour to do better for the future, and without delay; joining thereto our earneſt prayers to God, and a devout uſe of all thoſe means which he hath appointed us to uſe, for obtaining his grace and aſſiſtance: this is all that we can do; and conſequently all that our merciful God expects that we ſhould do.—But, if we come ſhort of this, and, notwithſtanding all our profeſſions of religion and piety, indulge ourſelves in any favourite ſin, or evil habit;—we are certainly in ſome ſenſe, and in ſome degree hypocrites; and if we continue ſo, can have no reaſon-

reaſonable ground to hope for favour and acceptance with God at laſt.—" *For* " *what is the hope of the hypocrite, though* " *he hath gained, when God taketh away* " *his ſoul?*

DIS-

DISCOURSE XII.

THE FORMER SUBJECT CONTINUED.

JOB xxvii. 8.

For what is the hope of the Hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his ſoul?

IN diſcourſing from theſe words I propoſed, — 1ſt, To conſider what ſorts of men fall under the denomination or character of religious hypocrites, according to the Scripture ſenſe of that word.—And, 2dly, To ſhew the inſufficiency and weakneſs of all the hopes which the hypocrite can propoſe to himſelf; and the great diſproportion between the gain he may make by his hypocriſy here, and the loſs he muſt ſuffer by it hereafter.

As to the former of theſe, I ſhewed, that there are different degrees of hypocriſy; and conſequently different claſſes or kinds of religious hypocrites.

The

The firſt and worſt of them are thoſe who, though they deſpiſe religion in their hearts, yet make a pretence of profeſſion of it, in order to cover and carry on ſome corrupt or worldly view. And next are they, who though they do not abſolutely diſbelieve or deſpiſe all religion, yet content themſelves with practiſing the outward, and eaſieſt parts of it, while they utterly neglect that inward purity and real virtue, which is the life, and ſoul, and power of true godlineſs.

Theſe two are what the Scripture calls an abomination to the Lord; *i. e.* the higheſt poſſible provocation of his diſpleaſure.

But there is likewiſe a lower ſort of hypocriſy, of which too many, 'tis to be feared, are guilty; and by which indeed they impoſe more upon themſelves than upon others; namely, the putting off repentance and reformation till ſome time hereafter; or, endeavouring to do it at preſent, but faintly, and ineffectually, through the deceitfulneſs of ſin, and of their own corrupt hearts, which too often betray them, and make them forget

forget and break through their good purpoſes and reſolutions.

Theſe latter kind of hypocrites, however, are far from being ſo criminal as the former: and therefore, God uſually corrects ſuch perſons with his judgments, or invites them by his mercies; he gives them ſpace for repentance, and bears long with them through his patience; till at length they either deliver themſelves out of the ſnare of the devil by a thorough amendment, or become finally hardened, and incorrigible.

I proceed now to the ſecond general head of my diſcourſe; *viz.* To ſhew the weakneſs and inſufficiency of all the hopes which the hypocrite can propoſe to himſelf, and the great diſproportion between what he may gain by it here, and muſt loſe by it hereafter. "*What* "*is the hope of the hypocrite, though he* "*hath gained, when God taketh away his* "*ſoul?*"

I need not again mention, that religious hypocrites, in the firſt and worſt ſenſes of that word, have always ſome worldly end in view, which they hope for; and which the very words of my

text ſuppoſe they may gain by their hypocriſy. — Joſephus tells us of the Phariſees of old, that they were in ſuch eſteem amongſt the people, by pretending to a greater exactneſs in religion, than the reſt of the Jews, that they made all other factions truckle to them; they governed in all matters of ſtate, and obtained a ſingular eſtimation and eſteem among the multitude. And the ſame is the view or hope of all thoſe pious politicians, who have the aſſurance to carry a diſtinction or reſerve in their ſleeve, againſt their conſcience; and can turn themſelves into every ſhape, upon every occaſion; can call evil good, and good evil; can humour all perſons, and act with and connive at all perſuaſions; can flatter the proud; vindicate and glorify the oppreſſor; praiſe the ambitious, bribe the covetous, and comply with every ſcheme of profitable iniquity that can be contrived by the devil, or executed by his agents: and all this under the ſpecious pretexts of prudence and moderation; yea many times under the cloak of zeal for purity of religion, and reformation of errors and abuſes. Whilſt, at bottom, they act thus only for

for the ſake of what they call a character in the world; or, for ſome profitable preferment to themſelves or families.

This is their hope; for, in the Scripture ſtile, hope often ſignifies the object, as well as the act; the thing hoped for, as well as the actual hoping for it. Thus*, "*We, through the Spirit, wait for* "*the hope of righteouſneſs, by faith*;" *i. e.* the promiſed reward of it. So likewiſe†, "*Looking for that bleſſed hope*;" or, being in joyful expectation of that immenſe happineſs, which ſhall crown the righteous, at the time "*of the glorious* "*appearance of the great God, and our* "*Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.*"——As therefore the hope of a Chriſtian ſignifies, both what his expectations are at preſent, and what his reward ſhall be hereafter; —ſo the hope of the hypocrite, is the reward he expects for his hypocriſy; or the end he propoſes to attain by it. And what is this; or, of how little real value is it, all circumſtances duly conſidered? For, ſuppoſing his reputation ever ſo fair, or his wealth ever ſo great; —he muſt ſtill be conſcious to himſelf,

* Gal. v. 5. † Tit. ii. 13.

that it is all but an unjuſt, ill-gotten purchaſe.—He muſt know, that popular praiſe and eſteem, though ever ſo well grounded, is one of the moſt fickle, uncertain things in the world; and much more ſo, when ſupported by nothing but falſehood and deceit.—And, however nicely he may act his part, and whatever pains he may take to keep his diſguiſe cloſe about him, he cannot be without ſome fears of being catched and found out; and ſo muſt be continually on his guard, leſt nature ſhould appear before he is aware, and ſo ruin all his plot in an inſtant.

This has often happened, and the detected hypocrite has ſuddenly fallen from eſteem and wealth, into contempt and poverty.—What then is his hope, even in this world, in compariſon of the drudgery he muſt undergo, and the riſque he muſt run?—And how much better and wiſer is it, to ſeek for happineſs in the plain, ſtraight road of true virtue and honeſty?

But now, ſuppoſing the hypocrite to have attained his hope and wiſhes, as has been often the caſe; and to have eſcaped diſcovery, all the days of his life, which likewiſe

likewiſe has ſometimes happened, yet what will all this ſignify at the hour of death; — and, as my text expreſſeth it, "*when God taketh away his ſoul?*" — When the poor wretch comes to quit the ſtage, upon which he hath trod his deceitful rounds ſo long; — when the wolf is ſtript of his ſheep's cloathing, and he is ready to go out of the world as naked as he came into it; — when he finds himſelf upon the brink of eternity, and his ſoul ſtruggling as it were to get rid of his body, or rather, his body no longer able to be a cover or lodgment to his ſoul:—What is the hope of the hypocrite at that critical moment?—Or rather—what muſt be his fears?—Perhaps he has brought himſelf to diſbelieve a future ſtate, and to deny that there is any ſuch thing as rewards or puniſhments in another world.—Many have brought themſelves to this ſtate of unbelief; or at leaſt pretended ſo; and ſome few have perſevered to the laſt in that impious profeſſion; and their geat hope at their death is to ſink into nothing: a poor proſpect truly; and which can be of very little comfort to them, when they are ready to be be-

reaved of every thing, in which their happineſs was placed; and for which they had laboured ſo hard, all their lives.

But the far greater number of deſigning hypocrites, have been frightened out of their infidelity, as well as their hypocriſy, by the near approach of the king of terrors; and have let fall the maſque of themſelves, when they ſaw it ready to be torn from them. — And, oh! — what muſt be the dreadful thoughts and expectations; what muſt be the ſhame and anguiſh of ſuch a ſoul, when it hears and feels the laſt ſummons of its Maker calling it away, to fix it in a ſtate, unchangeable and eternal? —Hopes of happineſs it can have none; and as little hopes of mercy.—It knows that God has already marked out the deſigning hypocrite as one of the greateſt objects of his wrath; and that even the meek, the merciful Jeſus, who called upon and ſpoke to all other ſinners with ſuch tenderneſs and compaſſion; yet, when he addreſſed himſelf to hypocrites, could not refrain from terms of the greateſt ſeverity; "*Ye ſerpents*," ſaid he, "*ye generation of vipers, how can ye eſcape*

"*the*

" *the damnation of hell* * ?" And he makes the portion of hypocrites, and of obſtinate infidels and unbelievers, to be the ſame.—What then can be the hope of the hypocrite; or of what value is all that he hath gained, when God taketh away his ſoul? — All the riches and treaſures he hath purchaſed by his double-dealing and hypocriſy, will vaniſh like a ſhadow, and ſignify no more to him than if they had never been. — All the alluring reliſh of them will then be gone; nay, turn into hatred of them, as the cauſes or inſtruments of his ruin: and all the cunning and prudence he ſo much valued himſelf upon, will then appear a courſe of the moſt deſperate madneſs and folly.

O! that men would think in time how little any preſent, tranſient accommodations or advantages will appear to them, when laid in the balance with eternal miſery! O! that they would but conſider how ſhort, and what a mere dream this preſent life is; or, rather what a mere nothing, in compariſon with eternity!

* St. Matth. xxiv. St. Luke xii.

So much for the ſad ſtate of the deſigning, crafty hypocrite at the hour of death.—But the unthinking, cuſtomary one; the one who has none of the vile, underhand intrigues that the other hath, yet minds nothing but the outſide of religion; or at leaſt neglects ſome of its eſſential duties, and indulges himſelf in the habit of ſome ſins which it expreſsly forbids; theſe ſorts of hypocrites will perhaps flatter themſelves, that their hopes are better grounded, and that the great Judge of mankind will be as indulgent to them, as they are to themſelves. But all this is mere infatuation.

Though their guilt, indeed, may not be ſo great as that of the others, and they may hope to be beaten only with fewer ſtripes; yet it is great enough to deprive them of all the benefits of our holy religion, and, unleſs they timely repent, to leave them in the ſame ſad ſtate as if there had been no Saviour of mankind; nay indeed their condition will be far worſe; becauſe they knew of this Saviour, and profeſſed to believe in him as ſuch, and to be of the number of his diſciples and followers; were duly inſtructed

ſtructed in the doctrine he taught, and the conditions he required for attaining eternal life; and yet neglected all, and were no better than the ſhadows of a true Chriſtian.—No doubt, moſt of this kind of people have ſome general hopes of being ſaved, on account of their Chriſtian profeſſion; yet theſe hopes are utterly without foundation, like the houſe built upon the ſand; and ſhould not indeed be called hope, but the moſt arrogant and fooliſh preſumption.—A man may as well expect a plentiful harveſt, whilſt he ſows mere chaff; as expect the ſight and enjoyment of God, without that real holineſs of heart and life which the goſpel requires:—for we are moſt expreſsly warned, that "*whatſoever a man ſows, that ſhall he alſo reap.*"

A ſincere and hearty religion will produce a ſubſtantial, full felicity; but that which is empty and formal, will have as empty a reward—and the man's fond fancies of his being made happy by it, is all the taſte of happineſs he will ever have:—nay, what is ſtill worſe, theſe barren, fruitleſs profeſſors of religion, if they continue ſuch, will at laſt

be treated like that ſignificant emblem of them, the barren tree, which was ordered to be cut down and caſt into the fire.

Every religious hypocrite therefore, even thoſe of the loweſt, and leaſt guilty kind, though they may have no direct intention of mocking God, yet moſt miſerably mock and deceive themſelves: they are willing indeed to do a little for the ſake of getting to heaven; but they would fain do as little as poſſible;—no more than they think barely neceſſary to keep them out of hell. — They acknowledge that the hope and proſpect of eternal happineſs is very comfortable and deſireable: but they cannot think of parting entirely with the pleaſures of ſin for a ſeaſon.

And hence it is, that they lead ſuch a patched, motley kind of life: — ſome broken ſhreds of piety appear in it now and then: — ſome particular virtues are cultivated and practiſed; eſpecially thoſe that are moſt glaring and taking; and will procure them the largeſt meaſures of popular favour and applauſe: — But all the time they are as criminal in ſome reſpects, as they are commendable in

others :—and, as their heart is not right with God, ſo they may be well aſſured, that God, the great ſearcher of hearts, will never be impoſed upon by any of thoſe ſpecious pretences, wherewith they ſo miſerably impoſe upon themſelves; but is as much an enemy to ſuch a partial, diſſembled religion, as he is to thoſe who have no religion at all :—and he has fairly warned all ſuch pretenders to his favour, that when they ſhall come at laſt, pleading the merits of their profeſſions and performances, and crying unto him, "*Lord, Lord, have we not prophe-*"*ſied in thy name? and in thy name have*"*caſt out devils, and done many won-*"*derful works:*" or (as St. Luke has expreſſed it) "*have eaten and drunk in thy*"*preſence, and thou haſt taught in our*"*ſtreets*;"—and therefore they thought they might knock at the door with confidence, and ſay, "*Lord, Lord, open unto*"*us.*" But "*then,*" ſays our Lord, "*will I profeſs unto them, I never knew*"*you; depart from me, ye that work ini-*"*quity.*"

This is enough to baffle all the hopes of every pretender to religion, who does not live up to his profeſſion, and endea-

vour to ſerve and pleaſe God with ſincerity, and ſingleneſs of heart.

Let none of us then be ſo unwiſe any longer, as to flatter himſelf with imaginary and falſe hopes of happineſs, while he wilfully omits any thing commanded, or indulges himſelf in any thing forbidden by the law of God.

It is true, after we have done our beſt, our ſins and defects will be ſo many, and our virtues ſo imperfect, that had we not the infinite mercy of God, the infinite merits of our Redeemer, and the gracious promiſes of the goſpel to truſt to, the beſt of us might juſtly deſpair. — But theſe are abundantly ſufficient for the comfort and ſupport of every truly penitent and contrite ſoul; of every one, who can ſay with the holy apoſtle St. Paul *, "*Our rejoicing is this, the teſtimony of* "*our conſcience, that in ſimplicity and* "*godly ſincerity, not with fleſhly wiſ-*" *dom, but by the grace of God, we* "*have had our converſation in the world.*" Therefore, let it be our great ſtudy to act ſo, in all things and at all times,

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

that

that our hearts may not reproach or condemn us. For, if our own hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things: — But if our hearts condemn us not, then, and then only, may we have confidence towards God. Then may we truſt, not in our own righteouſneſs, but in his manifold and great mercies through Chriſt Jeſus; then may we hope, that, through the blood of the Lamb, we ſhall be waſhed from our ſins; and all our tranſgreſſions be blotted out; and that when the great Judge of heaven and earth ſhall appear, to ſeparate the chaff and tares from the wheat, and the ſheep from the goats, we ſhall meet him, not with dread and deſpair, but with joy and gladneſs, and receive from him that raviſhing approbation of our diligence and ſincerity, "*Well done, good and faithful ſervant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*"

Who, that heartily believes, and ſeriouſly conſiders all this, can be ſo fooliſh as to barter away ſuch glorious hopes, for the mean, ſordid profits, or the empty, unſatisfying pleaſures

ſures of this vain world ?—What man of common ſenſe and reaſon would not wiſh to have ſuch comfortable, refreſhing thoughts all his life long; but more eſpecially at the hour of death, and when God taketh away his ſoul; when all the glittering vanities of life, which ſo many are bewitched with, cannot, though he were poſſeſſed of them all, afford him the leaſt ſpark of joy or ſatisfaction! — To think, that God is at peace with his ſoul; that the holy angels are ſtanding ready to receive it, on its ſeparation from the body, and to convey it into the manſions of reſt and peace; till it be re-united to its old companion at the reſurrection of the juſt; and that then his whole man, body, ſoul, and ſpirit, ſhall be tranſported into the higheſt heavens, there for ever to behold the face of God in the glories of Chriſt Jeſus our Saviour!

This is the faith, this is the hope of every true Chriſtian: and this faith and hope is ſufficient (through the grace of God) to enable him to triumph, not only over all the troubles of life, but likewiſe

likewiſe over all the horrors of death; and even to welcome his diſſolution, when it comes, with joy and thankfulneſs.

Seeing then our bleſſed Redeemer hath opened the kingdom of heaven to all true believers; ſeeing he died for all, and is not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance;—let us endeavour to do our part, and to work out our own ſalvation with fear and trembling: and may God Almighty grant us all, the grace ſo to reſolve, and ſo to do, through Jeſus Chriſt our Saviour.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XIII.

THE ADVANTAGES ARISING FROM GOOD COMPANY, DISPLAYED.

DISCOURSE XIII.

PROV. xiii. 20.

He that walketh with wiſe men ſhall be wiſe: But a companion of fools ſhall be deſtroyed.

IT may be ſaid of this collection of Proverbs, that it is a ſyſtem of Solomon's moral wiſdom: and the words of my text are one of thoſe excellent advices or maxims, which might reaſonably be expected from one of his conſummate prudence and experience in the world,—even without the aid of ſupernatural inſpiration.—I doubt not, but any aged perſon, who had formerly been engaged in a vicious courſe of life, upon the very hearing of theſe words, would be ready to give his teſtimony to the truth of them, and to acknowledge

knowledge with ſhame and ſorrow, that the company and converſation of fooliſh or wicked men, was the great ſource of all his miſcarriages and misfortunes.—But that which I chiefly intend, by a diſcourſe on this ſubject, is to endeavour, as much as I can, to imprint the truth of what Solomon here advances, upon the minds and memories of young people; in order to guard their innocence, and ſecure their virtues,—and ſo prevent that trouble and remorſe in their old-age, which a life ſpent in folly or wickedneſs muſt naturally occaſion.

And with this view, which I pray God to ſecond with the powerful influences of his grace upon their hearts, I ſhall proſecute my diſcourſe in the following method.

1ſt, I ſhall point out the uſe and improvement to be made of good company.

2dly, The diſadvantages and ill conſequences which flow from bad company.

And then apply the whole in ſome practical inferences and reflections.

But before I enter upon theſe topics, it may not be improper to explain,

in

in a few words, the ſeveral terms made uſe of in my text. — The firſt is, *He that walketh.* — Walking is an expreſſion frequently made uſe of in Scripture, to denote the actions of the mind. —It is taken from the motion of the body, and by an eaſy metaphor is fitly transferred to the briſkneſs and activity of the ſoul.—But here in my text, as in ſeveral other places of Scripture, walking doth not denote only a ſingle, or caſual act, but a cuſtom and habit of converſation.

An accidental meeting, or an extraordinary viſit, be it either for civility, or in the way of buſineſs, may not be attended with any uncommon effects. —Nay, in many caſes we may find it our indiſpenſible duty, to be often in company with men whoſe characters and morals are notoriouſly bad: but this is not voluntary, or what we would do of our own free choice, which is the meaning of walking with them in my text; for by this is meant the aſſociating and linking ourſelves in friendſhip and familiarity with men of honeſt, or of vicious principles; the making choice of, and frequenting their company, as the perſons in whoſe ſociety we take moſt delight;

light; and upon which, our own proficiency in virtue, or our plunging into vice greatly depends. Secondly, another term here made uſe of by Solomon, is that of *wiſe men.* Wiſdom is an expreſſion which is ſometimes uſed in Scripture to denote knowledge — but more frequently it ſignifies religion.—I ſhall touch on both theſe ſenſes of it, in my following diſcourſe; and ſhall conſider the advantages that flow from ſociety, or intimacy with both intelligent and pious perſons.—The oppoſite to wiſdom is folly; and by conſequence we are to underſtand by fools, either ignorant, or irreligious perſons, but rather, indeed, the latter, who are generally diſpoſed to communicate their follies and vices to thoſe who aſſociate, or converſe with them.—Their companions, ſays the text, "*ſhall be deſtroyed:*" —Deſtroyed in this world, for want of the knowledge and government of themſelves, and for copying the follies and extravagancies of their inſtructors; —deſtroyed in another world, for want of thoſe morals and principles, which are neceſſary for the ſalvation of their ſouls, and the enjoyment of celeſtial happineſs.

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The words of my text being thus explained, I return to my propoſed method; the firſt article of which was, to point out the uſe and improvement to be made of good company.—"*He that walketh with wiſe men* "*ſhall be wiſe.*"—Now, if according to the foregoing explication of the word wiſdom, we take it, in the moſt common ſenſe, for prudence, knowledge, or underſtanding in the affairs and occupations of this life, it would need very few words to convince you, that the keeping of good company is a due and proper means for the improvement of us in the knowledge and management of our ſecular affairs.—It is not my buſineſs here, and as little am I able at any time, to inſtruct you in the myſteries of worldly wiſdom (taking that word in an innocent ſenſe) or to ſhew you the particular methods of acquiring riches or promotion. — It is only my province to recommend in general, thoſe duties of prudence, diligence, and induſtry, which are ſo neceſſary to our well-being in this world, and ſo uſeful in their conſequences to our families and poſterity. —Upon this footing, Solomon's advice for the choice of our companions comes

recommended

recommended to you, with all the advantages of example, inſtruction, experience, correction, rebuke, and the like. He that walketh with wiſe men, ſhall, by all theſe methods, grow, and increaſe in wiſdom; he that is the happy companion of ſuch knowing and judicious perſons, ſhall ſoon rectify the miſtakes of giddy and heedleſs youth, and form truer notions of perſons and things.—He ſhall ripen in his judgment, improve his obſervations, reform his conduct, ſurmount difficulties, and guard againſt errors for the future.—Prudence and dexterity will inſenſibly ſteal upon him; and his very ſoul will be enlightened with the rays, and invigorated by the influence and example of his companions.—In fine, it would be almoſt an endleſs taſk to enumerate all the advantages that the world receives from the ſociety and converſation of diſcreet and intelligent perſons; from the councils and cabinets of princes down to the moſt ordinary artificers and mechachanics. This latter claſs of men is far from being contemptible—for, as the wiſe ſon of Sirach expreſſes it *, *Though*

* Eccl. xxxviii. 33, 34.

they

" *they may not be ſought for in public*
" *counſel, nor ſit in the Judges ſeat, nor*
" *underſtand the ſentence of judgment;*
" *yet they will maintain the ſtate of the*
" *world; and all their deſire is in the work*
" *of their craft.*" Their buſineſs, like more noble occupations, is propagated by ſkill and inſtruction; and the myſteries of their reſpective callings diſcovered, by a familiarity with, and an imitation of the compleateſt artiſts. — " *As iron*
" *ſharpeneth iron, ſo a man ſharpeneth*
" *the countenance of his friend.*" As neceſſity is the mother of invention, and emulation the propagator of arts and ſciences; ſo mutual converſation heightens men's curioſity, awakens their parts, and is oft-times the occaſion of making the greateſt diſcoveries and improvement, in all the various employments and occupations of human life.

Recluſe and contemplative men, may devour a number of volumes, and furniſh their underſtandings with a noble ſet of ideas; but it is action which is the principle of good government; and mutual converſation and example is the thing of any that will beſt direct us as to our actions, and introduce us to the

ſecrets of buſineſs, both as to theory and practice.—But not to inſiſt longer upon our temporal affairs, or the wiſdom that is neceſſary for the management of them, let us turn our eyes to that which is of far greater moment to us, the advancement and ſecurity of our eternal happineſs.—And here we ſhall find Solomon's maxim no leſs fully verified, "*He that* "*walketh with wiſe men, ſhall be wiſe.*" He who aſſociates himſelf with perſons of true piety and virtue, and takes pleaſure in their company and converſation, will find it one of the beſt means of his own improvement in the knowledge and practice of religion.—For there are three things by which morality and religion are, as I may ſay, naturally inſtilled into us, by other men; *viz.* Inſtruction, Example, and Reproof.—Now friendſhip, and intimate converſation with good men, give us free admittance to each of theſe, and conſequently, are almoſt infallible means of our improvement in virtue.

And 1ſt, as to Inſtruction.—"*The* "*lips of the wiſe,*" ſays Solomon, "*will* "*drop as the honey-comb* *." They will

* Prov. xvi. 24.

refreſh

refreſh and enliven, ſweeten and comfort all that are within the ſphere of their acquaintance. — The uſefulneſs of their exhortations will ſhew the integrity of the adviſers: and, if they are but tolerably prudent in the manner of conveying their exhortations and inſtructions, there are but few men of ſo rugged and perverſe a temper as not to be moved and ſoftened by them.

When a man, whoſe character for virtue and probity is well eſtabliſhed, has at the ſame time the art, as I may call it, of ſpeaking out his virtuous ſentiments in an eaſy and agreeable manner; — when, like Moſes, his doctrine drops as the rain, and his ſpeech diſtils as the dew; — when his healing diſcourſe deſcends as the ſmall rain upon the tender herb, and as ſhowers upon the graſs; how powerfully is the attention of his hearers engaged; — how do the hearts of his companions burn within them; — and if there be any ſpark of virtue in their breaſts, does not his breath blow it up into a flame? — It is certainly true, that the Divine ſpirit and grace of God is the chief principle of virtue and holineſs in the heart of man. — But this does

not hinder the uſe of exterior and ſubordinate means for the attainment of that great end. And of theſe, good inſtruction is one of the principal. "*Hear, ye children, the inſtruction of a father,*" ſays Solomon, "*and attend to know understanding. My ſon, attend unto my wiſdom, and bow thine ear to my underſtanding; that thou mayeſt regard diſcretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge.*" If thou haſt already attained that noble prize, the company of good men will be the ſtrongeſt guard and ſecurity to thy poſſeſſion of it. If thou art only in queſt of it, the ſame religious ſociety will greatly forward thy undertaking; and their wholeſome directions will conduct thee into the paths of virtue and holineſs.—As the author of the book of Wiſdom expreſſeth it, "*Surely all men are vain by nature.*"—Many men ſuck in prejudices by education; and moſt men contract bad habits of one kind or other, by a vicious neighbourhood.—But good company is one of the beſt remedies for all theſe; it diſpels our ignorance;—reforms our nature;—refines our conceptions;—and ſhews us the true and right uſe of all our various paſſions.—For, every

every truly good and virtuous man, endeavours to be as uſeful in his generation as poſſible; and eſpecially to help forward the ſalvation of his brethren with the ſame zeal that he proſecutes his own: — he rightly conſiders, that thoſe who win ſouls are wiſe; and that every one who converteth a ſinner from the error of his ways, ſhall ſave a ſoul from death, and cover a multitude of ſins: and therefore his heart's deſire and prayer to God for his brethren is, that they may be ſaved:—and his greateſt pleaſure is to inſtruct the ignorant, and thoſe that are out of the way, if peradventure he may be the happy inſtrument, under God, of bringing them to repentance, and to the knowledge of the truth.— What an unſpeakable advantage then muſt it be to cultivate the friendſhip, and frequent the company of men of this ſtamp?—Men, whoſe converſation adminiſters grace to the hearers, and is attended with all the circumſtances of profit and delight! — It is a ſalt which never loſes its ſavour, nor grows inſipid by uſe and repetition.—It is a fore-taſte of the joys of heaven, while we ſojourn here upon earth. — It is a near reſem-

blance to the communion of the saints in bliss; — an imperfect admission to the general assembly and church of the first-born; — and an imitation of the happy converse and society of the spirits of just men made perfect.

2dly, From the Instruction of wise and religious men, let us proceed to their Example; — the former respecting chiefly the information of our mind, and the latter the regulation of our actions.—For, we are not only in a capacity of knowing more than other persons, whilst we frequent the society of good men; but, we have the greatest motives and encouragement to make our practice conformable to our knowledge. A good example is virtue animated — religion set off to the life in all its sweetness and attractions; — not in the dull letter of rules and precepts, but in the commanding light and heat of action, and all the efficacious motives of love and obedience. There is something in the example of a virtuous man, which will affect one in some degree, whether he will or not. — His very mien, and gestures are oft-times instructive; — his very looks are like so many laws, and his smiles and frowns like so many rewards

wards and puniſhments:—but, above all, the comelineſs and gracefulneſs of his actions command veneration and reſpect. Vice is ready to ſneak and hang down its head, on his appearance; and there are few profligates ſo very hardened and abandoned as not to bluſh, and be confounded, when they compare their actions with thoſe of a real good man.—Villainy itſelf is not able to reſiſt ſuch ſtrong conviction; and he muſt be a reprobate indeed, who can ſpurn at ſo moving a call to repentance.

3dly, Another benefit which we receive from the ſociety of good men is, Reproof. —The very behaviour, and actions of a good man are in themſelves a ſtriking reproof to a wicked perſon.—But this is not always ſufficient.—It is often neceſſary to tell men, in expreſs terms, of the guilt and folly of their conduct.—This indeed is a very diſagreeable taſk: and the more wiſe and virtuous a man is himſelf, the more painful it is to him, to rake into the faults and follies of another. — It is likewiſe an office that requires no little art and temper, in order to make one's reproof have the deſigned effect.—A pedantic ſtiffneſs, or a ſuper-

cilious behaviour in the monitor, inſtead of ſoothing the paſſions, or reforming the manners of the offender, is rather apt to raiſe his reſentment, and harden and embolden him in his offence.

Different perſons, indeed, muſt be treated according to their different circumſtances.—With ſome, it is abſolutely neceſſary to uſe ſharpneſs and ſeverity; eſpecially when mild and gentle methods have been tried, and found to fail.—But for the moſt part, the ſofter the terms in which a reproof is couched, the ſtronger effect it will have;—for, as Solomon obſerves *, "*a ſoft tongue breaketh the bone.*" And one thing ought always to be particularly adverted to; *viz.* that it is a man's faults and vices, and not his perſon, which we condemn and diſlike;—that it is not his hurt or ruin, but his happineſs and reformation we ſeek after.

Upon ſuch a diſcreet and humane way of proceeding, the ſucceſs generally anſwers the application;—eſpecially, when the life and actions of the reprover, give a due weight to his admoni-

* Prov. xxv. 15.

tions

tions and reproofs.—For he who hath taught himſelf, is the perſon beſt qualified to teach others. — He who lives in the ſtrict practice of the ſevereſt duties of religion, is in the faireſt capacity to admoniſh others for the neglect of them. Let us never then be ſo unwiſe as to ſhun the company and converſation of a good man, for fear of meeting with a reprimand from him: on the contrary, let us eſteem and court moſt the acquaintance of ſuch virtuous perſons, as we find moſt ready to tell us freely and impartially of our faults. — "*Let the righteous ſmite* "*me,*" ſays the Pſalmiſt, "*and it ſhall* "*be a kindneſs; and let him reprove me,* "*it ſhall be a precious oil, which ſhall not* "*break my head.* Like a ſkillful hand that probes an wound gently, but at the ſame time thoroughly, and, by a ſeaſonable diſcharge of the latent corruption, reſtores the infected or bruiſed part to its former ſoundneſs, and adminiſters health to the whole body.

And this may ſuffice at preſent for the firſt head of my diſcourſe; the advantages we may hope to reap from the ſociety and converſation of good men.— "*He that walketh with wiſe men, ſhall be*

" *wise.*" And I should now proceed to shew, on the other hand, the disadvantages, and ill consequences which flow from bad company.

In the mean time, let us pray God, that he would give us grace to receive instruction with patience, to profit by example, and to reform by reproof; that we may, in due time, acquire that religious and heavenly wisdom, which will conduct us with safety through the difficulties of this troublesome world, and lead us to the pleasures and joys of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XIV.

THE FORMER SUBJECT CONTINUED.

PROV. xiii. 20.

He that walketh with wiſe men, ſhall be wiſe: But a companion of fools ſhall be deſtroyed.

IN diſcourſing from theſe words, I have already endeavoured to lay before you ſome of the advantages of frequenting the company and converſation of good men. "*He that walketh with* "*wiſe men, ſhall be wiſe:*"—and that with reſpect both to his temporal and eternal concerns.—I inſiſted chiefly on the laſt of theſe, and ſhewed you how natural and almoſt neceſſary it is that one ſhould improve in virtue and holineſs, from the inſtructions, the example, and the reproofs of a truly good and virtuous man.—And the truth of all this will be

be ſtill further confirmed and illuſtrated, by proceeding, according to Solomon's method in my text, to conſider the diſadvantages and ill conſequences which flow from bad company.—"*A companion of fools ſhall be deſtroyed.*" A melancholy truth, which we ſee almoſt daily confirmed by the ſad fate of many. A fate, for which many an anxious father deeply fears and feels; and for which many a prodigal ſon as deeply grieves, when it is too late to mend or prevent it.—A fate, which the ruin of many ancient families bears witneſs to; and of which their dilapidated houſes are ſo many frightful monuments.—To ſay nothing of thoſe many untimely deaths and diſgraceful executions, which are ſuch a reproach upon a Chriſtian country, and which generally derive their ſource from the baneful influence of wicked company.

But, in order to make the deeper impreſſion upon the hearts and minds of young people, for whom a diſcourſe of this kind is chiefly calculated, I ſhall be a little more particular in diſplaying the diſadvantages of keeping bad company, as they affect the body, — the reputation,

putation, — the eſtate, — the morals, — and the ſoul of man.

And 1ſt, Let us only think a little on the deſtructive influence of bad company upon the body:—and what a train of diſeaſes it generally brings in; eſpecially on delicate, tender conſtitutions. — How are the young bloſſoms nipped in the bud, and the very vitals waſhed away by ſurfeits and debauchery? — "*Who* "*hath woe? Who hath ſorrow? Who hath* "*contentions? Who hath babbling? Who* "*hath wounds without cauſe? Who hath* "*redneſs of eyes?* — *They that tarry* "*long at the wine, they that go to ſeek* "*mixed wine.*"—And therefore, as Solomon wiſely adds, "*Look not thou upon* "*the wine when it is red, when it giveth* "*his colour in the cup, when it moveth it-*"*ſelf aright; for at the laſt it biteth like a* "*ſerpent, and ſtingeth like an adder.*"— The ſcars are always freſh, and the wounds feſtering.—The venom is commonly viſible, in the inflamed veins, and the bloated countenances: — the ſtings of it remain to the laſt, producing ſhattered conſtitutions, and untimely deaths.

Such is the common fate of our rakes and

and debauchees,—many of whom become ſpectacles to the world even while alive. —For how often do their abominable and wicked courſes, bring trembling into their hands and rottenneſs into their bones? — How often do they outlive both their memory and judgment, even while they are but very little advanced in years?—And what is all this chiefly owing to, but the exceſſive liberties of vicious converſation, — and the allurements of wicked companions; — which decoy the young, and even ſometimes pervert the old;—which entrap the unwary, — and impoſe upon the ignorant; —which enfeeble the mighty,—and debauch the innocent? — We may ſay of ill company in general, what Solomon ſays of one particular ſpecies of it *; "*It hath caſt down many wounded, and* "*many ſtrong men have been ſlain by it.* "*It hath been as deſtructive as armies,* "*and rampant as the peſtilence.*"

2dly, Another diſadvantage of bad company is, the deſtructive influence it has upon a man's reputation. —We are generally anxious in the ſupporting our

* Prov. vii. 26.

character,

character, and full of reſentment, when the leaſt ſlur is caſt upon it. — But, inſtead of being angry with others, it would often be more prudent in many to reflect upon themſelves; and to conſider, whether their own behaviour has not gone farther towards the ruin of their good name, than all that the malice or ſlander of others could do. — For, all calumnies will ceaſe in time, if we do not give encouragement to their continuance, by our own vicious actions, and prove them true by the irregularity of our own practice. — But when we make it our choice to walk in the counſel of the ungodly, and to ſit in the tabernacle of the ſcornful; — when we take pleaſure in the riotous cabals of debauched men, and the frothy falſe wit of profligates and ſcoffers, we do but open the mouths of our adverſaries, and ſupply their ill-nature with matter to aſperſe us. — By our familiarity with wicked men, we betray an affection to their tenets and principles, and adopt their vices for our own: — and ſo become anſwerable, in ſome degree, for their faults and miſcarriages; and our characters muſt ſtand or fall with theirs. — If they are given to drunkenneſs, we

ſhall

ſhall hardly be reckoned ſober; — if they are lewd, we ſhall not be accounted chaſte; — if they are profane and atheiſtical, we muſt at leaſt be deemed well-wiſhers to vice, and retainers and abettors of infidelity.

We ſhall do well then to take heed to the many precepts and exhortations in Scripture, which enjoin us to abſtain from all appearance of evil, and not to truſt our virtue in the confines or neighbourhood of vice.

We ſhould treat our reputation as we would our chaſtity; — keep it from all ſuſpicion of temptation; — from the ſmalleſt air or breath of debauchery, leſt the infection ſhould inſinuate, and the poiſon ſpread itſelf; — and at leaſt our honour fall a ſacrifice to the looſeneſs of our companions.

3dly, From the loſs of reputation, let us proceed to the ruin of men's fortunes; for, honour and intereſt generally fall together, — and a ſet of debauched companions will ſoon eat out the bowels of a man's ſubſtance, as well as bring diſgrace upon his name. Next to the bleſſing of God, and his promiſes to the faithful, the tendency of natural cauſes will aſſure us, that diligence,

gence, care, and induſtry are the proper means of acquiring wealth.—But how diametrically oppoſite is bad company to all theſe thriving virtues? — What a miſſpending of time is it attended with? — What an omiſſion of opportunities?— What a neglect of application? —What a contempt of buſineſs? — It is "*the* "*hand of the diligent*," that "*maketh* "*rich*," ſays Solomon: and, again, "*Seeſt thou a man diligent, he ſhall ſtand* "*before kings; he ſhall not ſtand before* "*mean perſons.*"—But what claim hath he to diligence, who abuſes his talents, and miſ-ſpends his time, with looſe and idle companions? — What claim hath he to the countenance of men of honour, who is never better pleaſed than when he is with the refuſe and ſcum of the people, and that too, in the moſt ſcandalous places, as well as the worſt of employments:— ſuch company, inſtead of introducing a man to a court, may well throw him upon a dunghill; — and cloath him with rags rather than purple.

Profuſeneſs and prodigality are the natural conſequences of idleneſs and vanity; and whoever links himſelf with looſe

looſe and debauched perſons, makes a fair ſtep to ruin and beggary. Fetters and impriſonment are often the conſequences of that prodigality;—and ſometimes an untimely and ignominious death concludes the tragedy.

But further; This diſſipation of wealth, and forfeiture of reputation, do not only affect the body, but the mind alſo; and are generally attended with the corruption of manners, as well as the miſeries of want and poverty.—Prodigality and impiety generally go hand in hand;—and the ſame pernicious company which waſtes the ſubſtance in riotous living, debauches the conſcience, and corrupts the morals by lewd examples. — I am well perſuaded, that many a perſon might have ſecured his native innocence, and preſerved his integrity unſhaken and inviolable, had he not been ſeduced by the example, and borne down by the prevailing cuſtoms of debauched men. — Some people ſeem to have the ſeeds of virtue ſo plentifully ſown in them, and ſuch an innate ſweetneſs of temper and diſpoſition to goodneſs, that one could not ſuppoſe them eaſily ſeduced into vice, if cuſtom did not

not ſtifle nature, and ſolicitations of company deface the impreſſions of a virtuous education.—In this caſe too, it is remarkable, with what craft and policy the corrupters of manners begin their ungodly work, and play their engines upon the raw and unguarded part of mankind.—Youth is the age which is generally attacked; the age when the blood is hot, and the paſſions run high; when the judgment is unſettled, and the reaſon not come to maturity: — and it is no wonder, that more converts to impiety ſhould be made at this giddy ſeaſon, than when experience has fenced us againſt danger, and grey hairs have ripened us into habits of goodneſs.—How thick do ſharpers ſwarm round a young heir?—How buſy are rakes for the poiſoning of innocence?—How zealous are free-thinkers and infidels in ridiculing the truth? — With what unwearied diligence do all theſe purſue their prey? — With what inſinuating craft and caution do they ſpread their nets? — Well then might holy David pronounce a bleſſing upon that man "*who* "*hath not walked in the counſel of the* "*ungodly*,

" *ungodly, nor ſtood in the way of ſinners,*
" *nor ſat in the ſeat of the ſcornful.*"

Such company was indeed unworthy of the man after God's own heart, who " *turned not aſide from any thing that was* " *commanded him all the days of his life,* " *ſave only in the matter of Uriah the Hit-* " *tite.*"—On all other occaſions we find him particularly careful, with regard to the choice of his companions.—" *I have* " *not ſat with vain perſons,*" ſays he, " *neither will I go with diſſemblers: I* " *have hated the congregation of evil-doers,* " *and will not ſit with the wicked.*"—And certainly, thoſe perſons are the juſt objects of every good man's averſion, who affront his God, endeavour to lay waſte his conſcience, and rob him of his principles.—And it were much to be wiſhed, that the like pious reſentment did always actuate the profeſſors of religion, when the decent rules of converſation are tranſgreſſed, and things ſacred and venerable are treated with ſcorn and buffoonery.—Nobody knows what familiarity may produce, and how ſoon too much intimacy may ſhock the ſtrongeſt reſolutions.—Solomon was apprehenſive of theſe dangerous conſequences,

when he put on all the authority of a father, and exerted all the perſuaſion of an orator, to prevent the ruin of the perſon whom he ſtiled his ſon, and to caution him againſt the example, the manners and enticements of ſeducers. "*Enter not into the path of the wicked,*" ſays he, "*and go not into the way of evil men. Avoid it; paſs not by it; turn from it, and paſs away: For they ſleep not except they have done miſchief; and their ſleep is taken away, unleſs they cauſe ſome to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedneſs, and drink the wine of violence.*"

It was with the ſame charitable view, and for the prevention of the like evils, that God, when he was bringing the children of Iſrael into the land of Canaan, inhibited them ſo ſtrictly from all manner of communication and intercourſe with the neighbouring nations *.—The predominant vice of the Jewiſh nation, it ſeems, was idolatry; and the way to cheriſh and promote it, was, by a familiarity and alliance with Pagans.—For who can expect to hear or receive good,

* Exod. xxiii. and Deut. vii.

in

in the ſociety of thoſe who are the inventors or ſpreaders of evil?—Shall modeſty proceed from impudence, or chaſtity from the ſtews? Shall temperance flow from a debauch, or ſobriety from frequenting a tavern? Shall the reverence of an oath be learned from a common ſwearer; or the being of a God, and the principles of religion, from an Atheiſt, or an Infidel?—This were to bring light from darkneſs; or, to gather grapes from thorns and figs from thiſtles.—But we muſt not expect to work ſuch impoſſibilities; there can be no ſuch harmony between righteouſneſs and unrighteouſneſs,—no concord between Chriſt and Belial; nor ſhall any man be long a ſincere ſervant of God, who takes pleaſure in the company and converſation of the agents of the devil.—Alas! alas! the looſeneſs and corruption of our own times; the very language of our ſtreets, is too viſible a proof of the deplorable effects, which ill company has upon men's principles and actions.—A ſet of vicious companions is enough to corrupt a whole city or neighbourhood; and give ſuch a ſanction to impiety, that not ten righteous perſons ſhall be

be found for the preservation of a Sodom.—For men generally encourage one another in the commission of evil: —A multitude seems to attract, and indemnify; and numbers give life and spirit to a bad cause; till at last the defection becomes universal; and cunning persuasions and vile examples have such a powerful influence, that all go "*out of the* "*way, become abominable, and there is* "*none that doth good, no, not one.*"

Which leads me to mention the last, and most miserable effect of bad company; and that is, the loss of the soul—A loss so great, that the gain of the whole world cannot compensate for it; much less can the frothy delights of a filthy conversation, or the surfeits and excesses of sensual pleasure.—I have shewed how the soul is vitiated by bad company, and despoiled of all those principles which are essential to its happiness.—Now, the consequences of perseverance and indulgence in these debauches, must be eternal destruction.—Repentance generally comes too late, after such inveterate habits of sinning; and grace ceases to strive any longer, with the repeated obstinacy and perverseness of a stubborn

mind.—The devil enters, and takes poſſeſſion, guards againſt the returns of virtue; and, at the long run, commonly fills the diſtracted mind of an old ſinner, with the moſt dreadful anguiſh and deſpair.

We have heard of many of the moſt profligate and abandoned ſinners, who, when death was ſtaring them in the face, and their conſciences began to awaken and ſmite them, have made the moſt tragical outcries, and bitter complaints, for having miſ-ſpent their time, and loſt the opportunity of working out their ſalvation: And, above all, what doleful exclamations do they then make, againſt the ways of the world, and the artifices of ſeducers, whom they generally, and very juſtly blame as the chief inſtruments of their eternal ruin!

Wherefore, to conclude the whole,

Although I have not room for many of thoſe practical inferences and reflections which this ſubject would ſuggeſt, let me earneſtly recommend it to all, but eſpecially to thoſe who are young, and but juſt entering upon the world, to be extremely wary in the point of contracting particular friendſhips, and chuſing

their

their most intimate and beloved companions, since their well-being and happiness, both in this world, and the next, depend so very much on this one thing. — Whatever general acquaintance, or even more particular connections we may be obliged to have with men of bad principles or loose practices, let us beware of taking them into our bosoms, or of being more in their company than necessity forces us to be. — Let our chosen intimates and familiar friends be men of known prudence, probity, and fidelity, — men of true honour and sound principles, — men who take all opportunities of encouraging us when we do well, and of blaming or reproving us when we do amiss. — These are the only men to be trusted with the conduct of our lives, or the secrets of our hearts. — Whereas, if we throw ourselves into the hands and counsels of wicked, irreligious men, we shall certainly expose ourselves to ruin and disgrace. — And in particular, let us beware of those who are ready to flatter us, and to make specious excuses for our faults when we do amiss. — No species of men is more dangerous, than companions of this sort. —

O! that every young perſon would often conſider thoſe elegant deſcriptions of flatterers, which the author of the Eccleſiaſticus gives, in ſeveral parts of his book. "*A falſe companion,*" ſays he, "*ſpeaketh ſweetly with his lips, but in his* "*heart he imagineth how to throw thee* "*into a pit. If thou be for his profit,* "*he will uſe thee; but, if thou have no-* "*thing, he will forſake thee: If thou have* "*any thing, he will live with thee; yea,* "*he will make thee bare, and will not be* "*ſorry for it. If he have need of thee,* "*he will deceive thee, and ſmile upon thee,* "*and put thee in hope. When thou art* "*preſent, he will ſpeak ſmoothly, and will* "*admire thy words: but, at the laſt he* "*will writhe his mouth, and ſlander thy* "*ſayings. He will ſhake his head, and* "*clap his hands, and whiſper much, and* "*change his countenance.*" What artifice is here diſplayed, in entering into the confidence of the thoughtleſs and unguarded! — Let prudence therefore interpoſe, to guard us from ſuch an evil:—let us ponder men's words, ſuſpect their officiouſneſs, and deſpiſe their flattery; leſt we fall into ſuch hands, as, inſtead of helping us to work out our ſalvation,

salvation, may be the instruments of destroying both our temporal and eternal happiness.

Give us then, O Lord, thou lover of souls and preserver of men, the grace so to number our days, and regulate our lives, that we may apply our hearts to that holy and religious wisdom, which will teach us to avoid the solicitations of bad company in this world, and fit us for the society of saints and angels in another.

FINIS.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM